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THESIS

**RP-US BALIKATAN EXERCISES: A PEACE-BUILDING
TOOL FOR MINDANAO?**

by

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December 2005

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**RP-US BALIKATAN EXERCISES: A PEACE-BUILDING TOOL
FOR MINDANAO?**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how the Philippine-American security cooperation can contribute to building a sustainable peace in Mindanao by analyzing the proceedings and outcome of the 2002 RP-US Balikatan exercise at Basilan Island. Balikatan 02-1 was a counterterrorism cooperation wherein US military forces were deployed to the southern Philippines and provided training, equipment, and intelligence information assistance to the AFP in their combat operations against the Abu Sayyaf Group. Balikatan 02-1 successfully forced the ASG out of Basilan and this accomplishment facilitated humanitarian assistance and civic action projects that proved to be beneficial to the people of Basilan. Furthermore, Balikatan 02-1 helped restore a “new sense of peace and security” in the province. In view of these outcomes, this thesis asks how future Balikatan exercises may be conducted in order to contribute to a sustainable peace in the southern Philippines. This thesis argues that the RP-US Balikatan exercise series can be a tool for peace-building in Mindanao by means of concentrating its activities in the southern Philippines, as well as focusing on stabilization and reconstruction operations.

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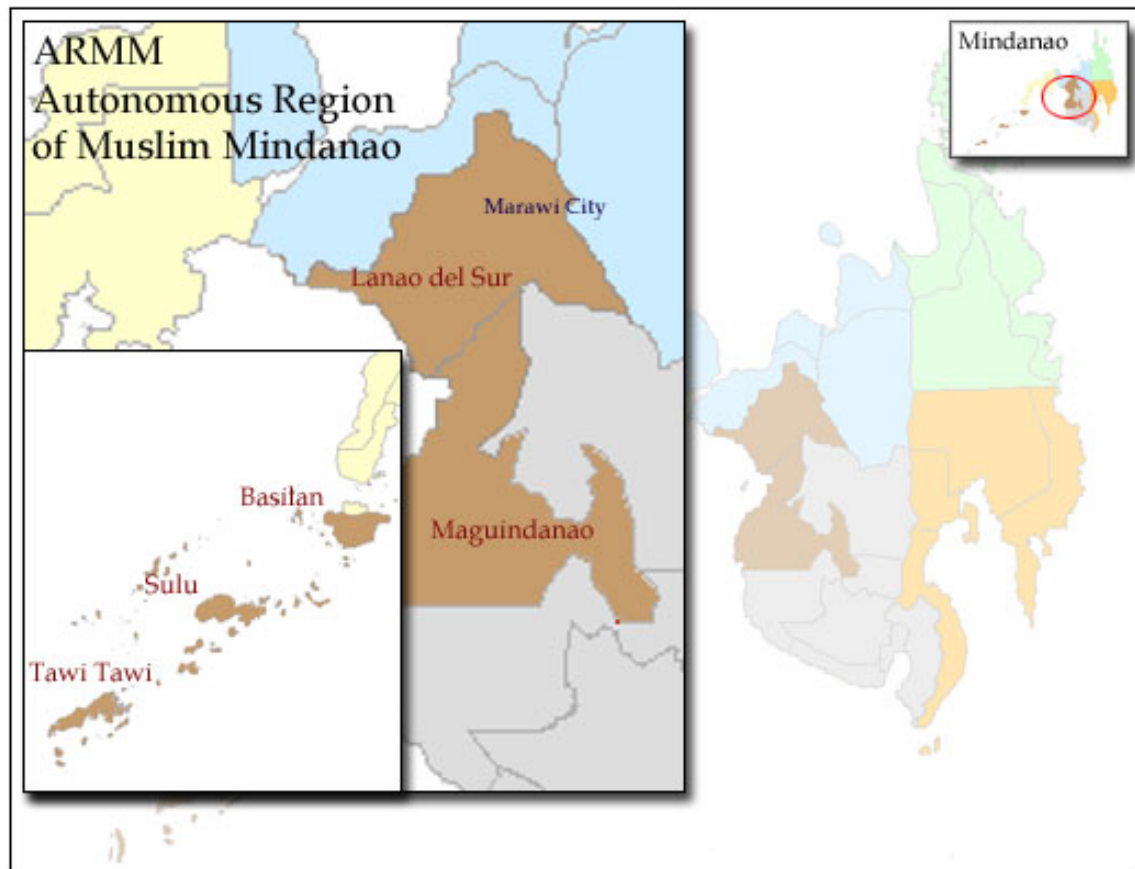
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Philippines



Map 1. The Philippines [From: <www.qvhone.com>, Accessed December 2005]

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Map 2. Autonomous Region in Muslim of Mindanao [From: <www.medco.gov.ph>, Accessed December 2005]

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I. INTRODUCTION

The rise of transnational terrorism has revitalized the once strong and special relationship between the Philippines and the United States which has been stagnant since the two countries failed to conclude a new military bases agreement in the early 1990s. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, the Philippine government gave its strong support to the US-sponsored Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo mentioned that “the Philippines is prepared to go every step of the way, as needed.” Arroyo offered logistical help and the use of Philippine air space and ports to support military operations in Afghanistan. She cited morality and Philippine national interests as reasons for her pro-US stand. She defined the national interest as linking a struggle against international terrorism with the struggle against terrorism within the Philippines.¹ In response, US President George W. Bush pledged to increase Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to the Philippines from \$1.9 million to \$29 million. Bush also pledged an additional billion dollars in trade benefits and announced his desire to provide an additional \$10 million in US Department of Defense goods and services to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Overall, it was noted that security assistance offered to the Philippine government was now expected to be worth nearly \$100 million for 2001 and 2002.²

In January 2002, US military forces were deployed to the southern Philippines to participate in the joint military exercise Balikatan³ 02-1. Balikatan 02-1 is a Philippine – American counterterrorism cooperation wherein US military forces provided training, equipment, and intelligence information assistance to the AFP in their combat operations against the Abu Sayyaf Group. US military personnel have also acted as advisers to AFP field commanders at the battalion level. It was the first time that the Balikatan exercise

¹ Mark Landler, “Philippines Offers US Its Troops and Bases,” New York Times, 2 October 2001, 5.

² “US Pledges Massive Military, Economic Aid to the Philippines,” Asia Times Online, 23 November 2001, available from <http://www.atimes.com/se-asia/CK23Ae01.html>, accessed on 15 October 15, 2005.

³ “Balikatan” is a Filipino word used as code name for the series of joint military exercises conducted between the US and the Philippines under the auspices of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty. It means “shoulder-to-shoulder.”

was conducted in Mindanao but it was not the first time that US military forces were deployed in the southern Philippines.

During the American colonial rule of the Philippines, the US Army governed southern Mindanao on the assumption that its population was wild, backward and unpacified.⁴ A series of battles were fought between US and the Moros⁵ from 1902 to around 1910. Two of the dramatic last stands of the Moros were remembered as the massacres at Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak, where hundreds of Muslims, including women and children, perished in heavy bombardment by US artillery which was followed by ground troops storming in with sophisticated weapons.⁶

These incidents are just two of the unpleasant memories haunting counterterrorism cooperation between the Philippines and the US in Mindanao. Balikatan 02-1 was also complicated by the existence of two major threat groups in Mindanao – the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the communist New People’s Army (NPA). Many critics argue that Balikatan 02-1 violated the Philippine Constitution, while others feared that the US military presence in Mindanao may affect ongoing peace negotiations with the MILF. On the other hand, most Filipinos are satisfied with the US assistance to the AFP in fighting the Abu Sayyaf and would like the US soldiers to go to other combat zone aside from Basilan.⁷ They view the renewed security alliance between the Philippines and its former colonial master as an opportunity to find solutions in ending the violence in the southern Philippines.

A. PURPOSE

The primary purpose of this thesis is to examine whether the military cooperation between the Republic of the Philippines (RP) and the US known as the Balikatan

⁴ Patricio Abinales, “American Military Presence in the Southern Philippines: A Comparative Historical Overview,” Politics and Security Series No. 7, East-West Center Working Papers (October 2004), available from <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/stored/pdfs/PSwp007.pdf#search=balikatan%20021>, accessed on 5 August 2005.

⁵ “Moro” is a termed bestowed by the Spaniards on the ethnic Malay people native to the southern Philippines. It also refers to Filipino Muslims.

⁶ Reynaldo C. Ileto, “Philippine Wars and the Politics of Memory,” *Positions* 13:1, Duke University Press, 2005, 232.

⁷ Social Weather Stations Media release dated August 6, 2002, available from available from <http://www.sws.org.ph/>, accessed on 24 November 2005.

exercises can be developed by the Philippine government as a peace-building tool that also integrates anti-terrorism measures for the southern Philippines. To accomplish this, the thesis first examines the legal framework of the Balikatan exercises. Second, the thesis studies the conduct of Balikatan 02-1 in 2002 and examines its successes, failures, and lessons learned from the exercise. Third, the thesis discusses what modifications may be adopted to improve the exercises' contributions to peace-building in Mindanao.

The Balikatan exercise series is an annual event aimed originally at improving RP-US combined planning, combat readiness, and interoperability while enhancing security relations and demonstrating US resolve to support the Philippine government against external aggression.⁸ Balikatan is the largest joint-combined military exercise that the Philippines is participating with countries in the Asia-Pacific region. As compared with previous Balikatan exercises, Balikatan 02-1 was the first time that the exercise was held in the southern Philippines, for a period of six months. Before then, the exercises were held in the island of Luzon and had a duration of one month. Furthermore, previous Balikatan exercises were focused on training against external aggressions while Balikatan 02-1 were on training and advising Philippine military operations against an internal threat from the Abu Sayyaf Group. The main assumption of the research is that by continually conducting Balikatan exercises in Mindanao, the joint military exercise will be beneficial in terms of professionalizing and enhancing the capability of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Southern Command and in promoting a sense of security for the people of Mindanao. During the initial planning survey for Balikatan 02-1, an assessment of the AFP's ability to conduct effective combat operations against terrorist groups was conducted. The results of the assessment indicated that the AFP has a marginal communications structure, ineffective civil affairs, limited mobility, and a lack of intelligence fusion needed to support operations.⁹ During the course of Balikatan 02-1, US military advisers supported the AFP Southern Command in developing intelligence-driven operations that promoted coordinated staff work and the fusion of intelligence

⁸ "Balikatan: Shouldering the Load Together," Global Security Website, available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/balikatan.htm>, accessed on 10 October 2005.

⁹ C.H. Briscoe, "Balikatan Exercises Spearheaded ARSOF Operations in the Philippines," *Special Warfare* (September 2004), 17, Pro Quest Database, accessed on 10 October 2005.

from all sources in the AFP joint operations center.¹⁰ AFP Southern Command is the largest and most important of the AFP's unified commands. It is responsible for combating three major threat groups in the Philippines, namely the communist New People's Army (NPA), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).

The people of Mindanao also deserve the most attention in security, political, and socio-economic terms. Based on the published human development index of 77 provinces in the Philippines by the National Statistical Coordination Board, the least developed provinces are all in Muslim Mindanao.¹¹ Inadequacy of basic government services and poverty in Muslim Mindanao provinces are major sources of grievances against the Philippine government that drive discontented Filipino Muslims to secession and extremism. The civic-action projects conducted during Balikatan 02-1 were instrumental in promoting socio-economic development in areas afflicted by the violence in that region. Balikatan 02-1 has denied the ASG of its sanctuary and also curtailed their movement. Likewise, the humanitarian and civic-action projects during Balikatan 02-1 earned local respect and reduced Muslim village support for the terrorists on Basilan. The humanitarian and civic-action projects also enabled the AFP, Philippine officials, and NGOs to work together and interact with the Basilan populace in a positive manner.¹²

Furthermore, shifting the focus of Balikatan exercises from traditional warfighting to stabilization and reconstruction operations will be timely and appropriate for the AFP in preparation for the eventual conclusion of the peace negotiations with the MILF. In the past, the Philippine government has depended heavily on the predominance of military solutions to address insurgencies wherein it has failed to develop an effective strategy that entails the AFP to perform support roles in nation-building whenever hostilities ended. For this reason, a successful concerted effort was never achieved by the Philippine military and other government agencies, as well as with NGOs in exploiting

¹⁰ C.H. Briscoe, "Rescuing the Burnhams: The Unspoken SOCPAC Mission," *Special Warfare* (September 2004), 47, Pro Quest Database, accessed on 10 October 2005.

¹¹ "2000 Philippine Human Development Index," National Statistical Coordination Board, available from <http://www.nscb.gov.ph/hdi/hdi2000.asp>, accessed on 11 October 2005.

¹² C.H. Briscoe, "Reflections and Observations on ARSOF Operations during Balikatan 02-1," *Special Warfare* (September 2004), 47, Pro Quest Database, accessed on 10 October 2005.

those windows of opportunity to build a sustainable peace in Mindanao, thus creating an environment prone to the resurgence of violence.

B. IMPORTANCE

The Philippines remains to be afflicted by two of the oldest insurgencies in Southeast Asia. The communist NPA which was formed in 1969 has been seeking to overthrow the Philippine government through protracted guerilla warfare. In Southern Philippines, a Muslim secessionist movement led by the MILF has been fighting for a separate Muslim state since 1977. MILF is a breakaway faction of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) that fought for Mindanao independence from 1972 up to the time they signed a peace agreement with the Philippine government in 1996. In addition, the Abu Sayyaf Group, formed in 1991 and the current target of the RP-US counterterrorism cooperation, is still posing a threat in the region. These perpetual insurgency problems and terrorist threats negatively affected the economic, social, and political stability of the Philippines. The US government has offered assistance to the Philippines in combating terrorism and in 2002, US sent military advisers to Mindanao to provide assistance to the AFP in fighting the ASG. Likewise, civic-action projects civic action projects under “Operation Gentle Wind” were also carried out which has significantly contributed in improving the living conditions in Basilan and Zamboanga.

Thus, by looking over the lessons, problems, and prospects of Balikatan 02-1, the Philippine government can determine on how future Balikatan exercises may be develop into a tool for peace-building in southern Philippines. The conduct of the exercise in Mindanao created a sense of security that paved the way for social and economic development. The US Agency for International Development is also currently involve in development projects in Mindanao and with a close coordination of these two activities, more opportunities and advancement may be achieved in building a sustainable peace in Mindanao. Likewise, the Balikatan exercises is also a good opportunity for the AFP to professionalize and learn the concepts of stabilization and reconstruction operations which the US military had extensive experience in Japan, Germany, Afghanistan and Iraq. In the past, the AFP’s strategy in fighting insurgencies was to “clear, hold, and consolidate” areas influenced by rebel groups. It seems that the AFP was successful only on the “clear” strategy but mostly failed in “holding” and “consolidating” these cleared

territories. Similar to the concepts of stabilization and reconstruction operations, after military forces had established a secure environment, it should transition from combat to support roles in nation-building. However, this is one area where the AFP, the national police, local and national government agencies, as well as NGOs lack coordination and training. There are many factors that contribute to this problem and one of this is the absence of AFP's capability in stabilization and reconstruction operations. The Balikatan exercise series is a good platform to start developing these capabilities through joint planning and training that will involve important actors who will play or are already playing a role in promoting stability and peace in Mindanao.

Furthermore, it is recommended that AFP focus its efforts in developing peacekeeping and other peace-support capabilities rather than trying to advance its combat capability. Looking at reality, AFP is more suitable in performing peace operations in order to fulfill effectively its obligations under the RP-US Mutual Defense Treaty. The deployment of AFP personnel in Iraq is one example on how Philippines can support the US in its security initiatives by performing "military operations other than war" (MOOTW) like humanitarian assistance and peace-support operations. The development of this capability within the AFP and other Philippine government agencies is more beneficial in addressing the current threats in southern Philippines rather than focusing on traditional military solutions of war-fighting.

Continuing the conduct of Balikatan exercises in Mindanao and focusing Balikatan activities on stabilization and reconstruction operations will be influential in promoting a sustainable peace in Southern Philippines. This thesis assesses the current security cooperation of the Philippines and United States and recommends how the Balikatan joint military exercise series can exert a positive influence to enhance peace and stability in the southern Philippines.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been significant debates among policy makers, scholars, and the civil society in the Philippines regarding the conduct of RP-US Balikatan 02-1 joint military exercise in Mindanao. Balikatan 02-1 was a six-month military counterterrorism cooperation with US troops providing advice and training to the AFP in combating the notorious Abu Sayyaf Group in the island of Basilan. However, critics charged that the

real reason was to go after the Abu Sayyaf who was holding two American hostages at that time. They also censured that it was a violation of the constitutional provision of banning foreign troops on Philippine soil. On the other hand, supporters of this bilateral cooperation responded that the American presence could improve the fighting capability of the AFP and that the American civic-action programs could jump start social and economic development that were postponed or derailed by the war and the Abu Sayyaf kidnappings¹³. As mentioned by Charles Donnelly in a paper presented at the 15th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, the most important outcome of the Balikatan 02-1 exercises has been the enduring diplomatic and military courtship between Manila and Washington. The Bush administration has granted the Arroyo administration \$100 million in security assistance; \$20 million to modernize the Philippine armed forces; \$10 million in Defense Department goods and services; \$1 billion in trade benefits; up to \$430 million in debt relief; guarantees for up to \$150 million in agricultural exports; \$40 million in food aid; and \$29 million in poverty alleviation.¹⁴ Donnelly also argues that “the ASG remains outside the Philippine government’s locus of negotiations and are dealt with militarily. Despite facing overwhelming military odds, the group displays an uncanny knack to evade capture, regroup and restrike. It is therefore improbable that a military solution will produce a long-term solution to an entrenched problem.”¹⁵ Although this thesis agrees with Donnelly’s conclusions, it also argues that a stable and secure environment is necessary so that post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction operations can come in and lay the foundations for a long-term solution of the ongoing conflict. Important post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction activities were not given enough emphasis during Balikatan 02-1. Additionally, according to Zachary Abuza, the Philippine Armed Forces failed to maintain the momentum generated by the joint Balikatan exercise in the second

¹³ Patricio Abinales, “American Military Presence in the Southern Philippines: A Comparative Historical Overview,” Politics and Security Series No. 7, (East-West Center Working Papers, October 2004, available from <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/stored/pdfs/PSwp007.pdf#search='balikatan%20021>, accessed on 5 August 2005.

¹⁴ Charles Donnelly, “Terrorism in the Southern Philippines: Contextualizing the Abu Sayyaf Group as an Islamic Secessionist Organization,” (Australia: University of Tasmania, 2004), available from <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/ASAA/conference/proceedings/Donnelly-C-ASAA2004.pdf>, accessed on 8 August 2005.

¹⁵ Ibid.

half of 2002.¹⁶ As he mentions, a spate of bombings and a regrouping of rebel forces frustrated the United States that led to the announcement by American and Filipino officials of a larger exercise directed at the Abu Sayyaf presence in Jolo, and this was interpreted in the Philippines as a declaration that US troops would be deployed in a combat role. The subsequent outcry forced the cancellation of the exercise.¹⁷

In another paper focusing on the impact of Balikatan 02-1 to Philippine democracy and peace, Neri Javier Colmenares argues that “the continuing US military operations in the Philippines, within the context of the US war against terror, have substantially eroded the already weak democratic processes in the Philippines and also pose a serious threat to peace and stability in Asia-Pacific.”¹⁸ He further says that the current military operations and the growing reliance of President Gloria Arroyo’s administration on the Philippine military provides a fertile ground for the full return of anti-democratic and militarist forces akin to those that supported martial law under President Ferdinand Marcos. Colmenares also commented that the peace process particularly with the MILF and the National Democratic Front (NDF) representing the communist NPA, have been substantially derailed by the deployment of US troops, as well as threats of the US to expand their operations against these groups.¹⁹

Despite numerous criticisms of Balikatan 02-1, the joint military cooperation also had many positive accomplishments. Aside from eradicating major ASG strongholds and key leadership, it was also able to ameliorate the conditions of poverty and hopelessness that allow terrorist groups to flourish. As stated by Marco Garrido in his article “The evolution of Philippine Muslim insurgency”, the first round of Balikatan 02-1 was somewhat a success. The joint operations largely decimated the ASG and forced the group out of Basilan. The civic and humanitarian projects that accompanied the exercise

¹⁶ Zachary Abuza, “Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: The Crucible of Terror,” (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Neri Javier Colmenares, “US Military Operations in the Philippines: A Threat to Peace and Democracy,” Conference “War on Terror”: A Challenge to Democracy, 2002, 5-6, available from <http://www.migrante.org.au/downloads/USPhils.pdf>, accessed on 12 August 2005.

¹⁹ Neri Javier Colmenares, 6.

re-established a sense of peace and order on the island.²⁰ By replicating the success of Balikatan 02-1 and correcting its flaws, it can serve as a linchpin in attaining a stable and secure environment in southern Philippines. In the absence of a secure environment, it will be very difficult to introduce vital socio-economic programs and non-military measures which are important in countering terrorism in the southern Philippines. According to Peter Chalk and Kim Cragin, social and economic development can discourage terrorist recruits.²¹ They argue that many terrorist organizations attract new members from communities in which terrorism is considered a viable response to perceived grievances. Social and economic development policies can help to reduce the pools of potential recruits by reducing their perceived grievances and providing the members of these communities with viable alternatives to terrorism.

In a statement made by Ambassador Carlos Pascual, Coordinator for the Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization, to the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, he maintains that “there has been no greater supporter of the concept of developing a strong civilian stabilization and reconstruction capability than the uniformed military.”²² He cited that “in every single combatant command, soldiers have been increasingly pushed to take up responsibilities that they were not trained to do. The military wants to work with civilians that can be deployed with them to undertake civilian activities, allowing the military to concentrate on those activities for which they should be responsible. There is a need for partnership in planning that begins at the outset and is interlinked all the way through training, exercises, and finally the process of stabilization and reconstruction.”²³ Joint training and military exercises are confidence and security building measures that enhance cooperation and understanding among the military, as well as non-military, and the Philippine public. Exercises limit or reduce the level of distrust among participants which is essential for building confidence and a sense of security. It also could contribute

²⁰ Marco Garrido, “The Evolution of the Philippine Muslim Insurgency,” Asia Times (2003), available from http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/EC06Ae03.html, accessed on 25 August 2005.

²¹ Peter Chalk and Kim Cragin, “Terrorism and Development,” RAND Corporation, 2003, available from <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1630/MR1630.pdf>, accessed on 10 August 2005.

²² Carlos Pascual, “Stabilization and Reconstruction: Building Peace in a Hostile Environment”. Prepared Statement presented to the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, (2005), available from <http://www.state.gov/s/crs/rls/rm/48643.htm>, accessed on 27 September 2005.

²³ Ibid.

to trust-building among the AFP, civilian government agencies, and the broader population. By involving other stakeholders in the conduct of joint military exercises in Mindanao, a more cohesive effort in conflict resolution can be achieved. According to Alfredo Filler, “ordinary police action and even military insurgency weapons and tactics, are not effective in eliminating the ASG’s threat. A special anti-terrorist campaign plan, specially trained and equipped police and military units, working with the local executives and a network of special support systems, is needed.”²⁴ The network of special support system will help build social capital in Mindanao by enabling and empowering government agencies, the civil society, the private sector, and the international community to work together in formulating and implementing a coherent strategy for peace and prosperity in Mindanao.

In summary, the Philippine-American counterterrorism cooperation in Mindanao has been beset by contradicting issues and concerns on the political, legal, military, and socio-economic context. Three years have already passed since Balikatan 02-1 and US troops were not directly involved in combat actions. They have remained as advisers and trainers to Philippine military forces. Balikatan has not been expanded to fight the communist New People’s Army and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front as some critics feared would. At the moment, there are still US Special Forces in the Philippines who are advising and assisting the Philippine military in enhancing its capability in fighting terrorism but their numbers are relatively small as compared to Balikatan 02-1. As a component of the RP-US Mutual Defense Treaty, Balikatan 02-1 was very important in enhancing the security cooperation between the United States and the Philippines, as well as in improving the Philippine military’s professionalism. Furthermore, it has proven its worth when it created a sense of security and peace in the island of Basilan. However, I argue that the ASG threat still exist in other parts of Mindanao and the success of Balikatan 02-1 may only be temporary if no aggressive follow-through on the part of the Philippine government in addressing other factors that contribute to the violence in Mindanao. By developing on the success of Balikatan 02-1 and shifting the focus from counter-terrorism to stability operations, there will be a greater opportunity of improving

²⁴ Alfredo Filler, “The Abu Sayyaf Group: A Growing Menace to Civil Society,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* Vol. No. 14, No.4 (Winter 2002), 142.

the socio-economic conditions of deprived Filipino Muslims thus giving peace a chance to flourish in the region.

D. MAJOR QUESTIONS AND ARGUMENT

1. Major Questions

This thesis explores the Philippine – American security cooperation and focuses on how this alliance can contribute to building a sustainable peace in Mindanao. More specifically, the thesis asks how the RP-US Balikatan exercise series may be conducted to contribute to a sustainable peace in the southern Philippines. For the purpose of this paper, sustainable peace is defined as the situation when, no matter what conflict occurs, parties no longer consider war to be an option.

The United States, as the only country with which the Philippines has a Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), is considered to be the Philippines' most important ally. The Philippine-American security alliance had its beginnings after World War II, when both countries signed the 1951 MDT. The treaty aims to provide mutual military assistance in case of an armed attack against one of the signatories. To ensure interoperability and a well-coordinated operation when the need arises, the AFP and the US Armed Forces from time to time conduct military exercises within Philippine territory. In 1947, the Military Bases Agreement (MBA) was also instituted, allowing the US to set up military bases on Philippine soil. Similarly, the Military Assistance Agreement (MAA) was signed that year; it served as the basis for the creation of the Joint United States Military Advisory Group - Philippines (JUSMAG-P). The 1947 MAA provided military aid used to support and reorganize the Philippine Constabulary in late 1947 in the face of growing internal unrest during the Hukbalahap rebellion.²⁵ In 1991, the MBA was terminated and in 1992, the US military forces based in the Philippines were all withdrawn. Despite the closing of the US military bases, both countries maintained their security alliance under the MDT.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution prohibits the presence of foreign troops in Philippine territory. For this reason, the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) was forged in order to continue the conduct of joint military exercises. Negotiations for the ratification of the VFA encountered numerous obstacles and were continuously criticized by many

²⁵ “Hukbalahap” is an acronym for “Hukbo Laban sa Hapon,” meaning “People Anti-Japanese Army.” The Hukbalahap movement, known simply as the “Huk,” was a communist-led guerilla movement that developed after World War II and launched an armed revolt against the Philippine government.

Filipino nationalists, as well as by anti-US movements. It was eventually ratified in 1999 and the Balikatan exercises resumed in 2000.

The rise of transnational terrorism created a new threat environment different from the Cold War and this led to the conduct of Balikatan 02-1. As with the VFA, Balikatan 02-1 was plagued by questions about its legality. Many Filipino constitutionalists argued that the role of US military forces are bordering on actual combat operations that is prohibited under the Philippine constitution. However, its successes in eliminating ASG strongholds and key leaders gained it support from many Filipinos. Without a doubt, the presence of US military, with its improved technology and effective monitoring techniques, added pressure on the ASG in Mindanao. US forces in Mindanao have brought an added sense of security to the local people and because of this, there are clamors from other parts of the country that similar activities be conducted in their localities so that they can also benefit from what Basilan has gained from bilateral cooperation. There are three provinces that offered to host the next Balikatan exercise. The governors of North Cotabato, Occidental Mindoro, and Compostela Valley appealed to President Arroyo that their provinces be considered for future joint military exercises. They said that the development projects undertaken in Basilan during Balikatan 02-1 could be replicated in their provinces. In addition, they also believed that the joint military exercise would “lessen the threats and dangers posed by such unwanted groups to the province and to the country,” referring to the communist New People’s Army.²⁶

In answering the main question of how future Balikatan exercises should be conducted, several subsidiary questions must also be answered. Answering the following questions allows formulation of a strategic plan for the conduct of future Balikatan exercises:

- What is the legal framework for the conduct of RP-US joint military exercises? Can the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty and other bilateral agreements between the Philippines and the United States be employed to promote peace and stability in Mindanao?
- How did Balikatan 02-1 come about and what was the situation in Mindanao prior to its performance? How was the exercise planned and executed, and how did it progress?

²⁶ “News Summaries on US-RP Military Agreements and Exercises,” March-April 2003, available from <http://www.philsol.nl/news/03/USMilitary02-mar03.htm>, accessed on 22 November 2005.

- What are the lessons to be learned, problems to be addressed, and potentials to be maximized from Balikatan 02-1?
- What modifications can be implemented to improve the exercise's contribution to building a sustainable peace in Mindanao?

2. Argument

This thesis argues that the RP-US Balikatan exercise series can be a tool for building a sustainable peace in Mindanao by means of concentrating its activities in the southern Philippines, as well as focusing on stabilization and reconstruction operations. The success of Balikatan 02-1 can be capitalized upon in order to promote stability in the region. However, it is also argued that the Balikatan exercises can only be successful if the planning and execution are transparent, the US military remains as advisers and trainers, and their military forces have a clear exit strategy so that the real intentions of the exercise will not create doubts or reservations in the minds of Philippine civil society.

In this thesis, the RP-US security cooperation and Balikatan exercises, including its military, political, and aid components, comprises the independent variable (IV) which affects the achievement of a sustainable peace in Mindanao (DV). The introduction of the IV affects the intervening variables by strengthening the degree of professionalism within the AFP, as well as improving its military capabilities in combating terrorism and other security threats. Likewise, the aid component of security cooperation, and particularly the humanitarian and civic action programs, provides improvement in local living conditions in high conflict areas and discourages the presence of terrorist groups and further recruitment.

With the increase in the degree of professionalism in the AFP, greater inclusion of stakeholders during the planning and training activities, more effective humanitarian and civic action programs, and a high level of support from Philippine civil society, terrorism and insurgency levels should diminish in Mindanao.

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graph LR; DV[DEPENDENT VARIABLE  
RP-US SECURITY COOPERATION & BALIKATAN EXERCISES] --> IV[INTERVENING VARIABLE  
Degree of AFP Professionalism  
Degree of Transparency  
Inclusion of Stakeholders  
Humanitarian & Civic Action Projects  
Support from Philippine Civil Society]; IV --> IVD[INDEPENDENT VARIABLE  
SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN MINDANAO]
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The diagram illustrates a conceptual framework with three main components: a Dependent Variable, a set of Intervening Variables, and an Independent Variable. The Dependent Variable, 'RP-US SECURITY COOPERATION & BALIKATAN EXERCISES', is shown in a box on the left. A large black arrow points from this box to a central column of five boxes representing the Intervening Variables: 'Degree of AFP Professionalism', 'Degree of Transparency', 'Inclusion of Stakeholders', 'Humanitarian & Civic Action Projects', and 'Support from Philippine Civil Society'. To the right of these boxes is another large black arrow pointing to a box for the Independent Variable, 'SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN MINDANAO'. Small upward-pointing arrows are positioned to the right of each of the five Intervening Variable boxes, indicating a cumulative or sequential effect. The entire diagram is titled 'CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK' at the top center.

The five intervening variables influence the capacity of the Balikatan exercises to build peace in Mindanao. The first intervening variable is the degree of military professionalism and integrity of the AFP, which embraces the moral conduct of its leadership and personnel in meeting national policies on the use of force for good. Human rights abuses, corruption, and the excessive use of force by the AFP in the past have undermined whatever successes Balikatan has achieved, and continued lack of professionalism will be detrimental in building a sustainable peace in Mindanao.

The third intervening variable is the inclusion of other actors, particularly key local leaders, NGOs, and other government agencies that may be involved in future stabilization and reconstruction operations. These key actors, as much as possible, can be

invited to participate in the planning process as well as in training activities where they have a role to play, and especially in civil-military operations. A more inclusive activity involving key players will create considerable opportunities to build social capital among the key actors, thus enhancing cooperation among them and with the military.

The fourth intervening variable is the degree of the impact on poorly developed provinces in Muslim Mindanao that is generated during the conduct of humanitarian and civic programs during Balikatan exercises. The Balikatan humanitarian and civic programs can generate significant positive effects for the local populace, especially in far-flung areas that have been deprived of basic government services. A properly executed civic action program can reduce friction between the civilian population and the military force, thus generating more support from the local population on the peace initiatives for Mindanao.

The last intervening variable is the degree of support from the Philippine civil society. Peace operations can only be successful and sustainable if they receive sufficient support from Philippine civil society. If there is a wide support for RP-US security cooperation and the proposed conduct of the Balikatan exercises, more opportunities can be generated that will contribute to promoting peace in Mindanao.

E. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

The thesis analyzes the conduct of the Balikatan 02-1 joint military exercise in Mindanao using a case study method and determines the lessons learned, its failures, and its prospects for building peace in the southern Philippines. In view of the debates surrounding the joint military cooperation, information and evidence is included from previous studies, contemporary scholarly literature, government and non-governmental organizations' documents, news reports, and other library information services on how the Balikatan exercises and other joint military cooperation exercises were planned and executed and with what results. Elucidation of the details of the Balikatan 02-1 case study is based on press releases and official statements from the governments of the United States and the Republic of the Philippines. After determining the legal frameworks, the lessons learned, and prospects for the RP-US Balikatan exercise, strategy options are formulated that can be adopted in future Balikatan exercises aimed at building peace in Mindanao. In developing a proposed strategy, this thesis used the

concepts developed by the Center for Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University in their publication *Transforming for Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations*²⁷ and the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Task Framework developed jointly by the Center for International Strategic Studies (CSIS) and Association of United States Army (AUSA). This thesis attempts to integrate these concepts with the current Philippine National Internal Security Plan, and the “clear, hold, consolidate, and develop” strategy in order to enhance the capability of the Philippine government in addressing the roots and causes of insurgencies and terrorism.

F. CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER SUMMARY

To provide the readers an adequate understanding of RP-US security cooperation and the Balikatan joint military exercise series, this paper is organized into five chapters.

Chapter II is an overview on the legal framework of the Filipino-American security and defense cooperation that started after World War II, became strained during the closure of US military bases in the Philippines, and has been revitalized in the global war on terrorism. The chapter is a comprehensive review of the available literature, including published works and research by scholars and other written articles on RP-US security relations and the war against terrorism.

Chapter III is an analysis of the RP-US Balikatan 02-1 exercise conducted on the island of Basilan, then a stronghold of Abu Sayyaf Group, in 2002. This chapter examines Balikatan 02-1's legal framework and discusses the relevant issues, controversies, and debates about how it was conducted. In this chapter, three phases of the exercise are examined, namely: the preparation phase, the training and field exercise phase, and the redeployment phase. The chapter also assesses the success of the joint military exercise based on its objectives and goals and how it affected the political and socio-economic conditions of Mindanao.

Chapter IV analyzes the prospects of Balikatan exercises as a tool for peace-building in Mindanao. It also discusses an overview of stabilization and reconstruction operations and how these relate to the Philippines' National Internal Security Plan and the “clear, hold, consolidate, and develop” strategy. Likewise, strategy options will be

²⁷ Hans Binnendijk and Stuart E. Johnson, eds., *Transforming For Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2004).

formulated and assessed to determine if the joint military exercises can be effectively and efficiently conducted in the format of stabilization and reconstruction operations. The concept of stabilization and reconstruction operations is very new to the Armed Forces of the Philippines. In the past, the AFP has concentrated much of its efforts on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations. With the introduction of stabilization and reconstruction operations, there will be a wider opportunity for the military, other government agencies, and non-governmental organizations to work together to attain a sustainable peace within the country.

Finally, Chapter V provides a conclusion and outlines policy recommendations.

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II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF RP-US SECURITY COOPERATION

A. INTRODUCTION

The security cooperation maintained by the Philippines with the United States plays an important role in the security of not only the Philippines but also the entire Asia-Pacific region. This relation began as early as 1898 when Filipino and American troops fought together against Spain, which had colonized the Philippines for more than three centuries. After the Spanish-American War, the US established colonial control of the Philippines based on the assessment that the Philippines is an important strategic forward base in the Asia-Pacific region. Military relations were first established during the colonial era when the United States helped the Philippines develop its military through the Philippine Commonwealth Act No. 1, also known as the National Defense Act of the Philippines of 1935.²⁸ With the advent of war with Japan, the Philippines became a prime target for Japanese bombardments because of the US military bases and its active involvement in the Philippine defense system.

After World War II, the Philippines and the United States maintained their relationship as allies. In 1947, the Philippine government signed two important agreements with the US that legally defined the parameters of Philippine-American security relations: the Philippine-American Military Bases Agreement and the Philippine-American Military Assistance Agreement. To further a collective defense of both countries, the Philippines and the United States signed a Mutual Defense Treaty on August 30, 1951. The treaty recognized that “an armed attack in the Pacific Area on either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and declares that it would act to meet the common dangers in accordance with its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional processes.”²⁹ However, from 1946 until 1992, the US presence in the Philippines

²⁸ “Philippine Army and Guerilla Records,” The US National Archives. National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, available from <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/philippine-army-records.html>, accessed on 8 October 2005.

²⁹ “Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America,” Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, available from <http://www.dfa.gov.ph/vfa/frame/frmmdt.htm>, accessed on 27 September 2005.

encountered opposition from different sectors of the Philippine society, particularly on the issue of sovereignty.

After the 1986 Philippine revolution against the dictatorial rule of President Ferdinand Marcos and the re-emergence of a heightened Filipino nationalism, a new constitution was drafted and ratified in 1987. The 1987 constitution states that a treaty approved by the Philippine Senate is necessary for foreign bases to remain in the country after 1991. The extension of the US military bases became a pivotal issue in Philippine politics. After negotiations in 1990, the Philippines notified the US that without a new treaty, American access to bases would be terminated in 1991. The US government proposed the Philippine-American Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Security in 1991 that could have extended the stay of US military forces in the Philippines. However, this proposal was rejected by the Philippine Senate, which led to the US withdrawal and the decline of the once strong and special Philippine-American relationship.

The only legal framework guiding the Philippine-American security cooperation after the US military pullout was the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty. In order to satisfy the provisions of the 1987 Philippine Constitution on the presence of foreign troops on Philippine soil, the two countries signed the Visiting Forces Agreement, which provides a legal framework for the two countries to resume joint military exercises. It also lays down the rules governing the conduct of US troops while on Philippine territory. Since the ratification of the VFA, the Philippines and the United States have been conducting joint military exercises under the series designated as Balikatan. After the September 11 attacks on the United States and the rise of transnational terrorism, the two countries reinvigorated their security cooperation through the conduct of Balikatan 02-1 in 2002 as a counterterrorism training effort aimed at neutralizing the Abu Sayyaf Group, which is believed to have links with al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah.

This chapter explains the dynamics of the Philippine-American security relations through the various stages from its beginnings until the resumption of the Balikatan exercises. Specifically, it reviews and discusses the legal basis for the Philippine-American security cooperation, particularly on the conduct of joint military exercises and other military-to-military cooperation. It also analyzes and evaluates various issues and

debates about the significance of the RP-US Mutual Defense Treaty and the Visiting Forces Agreement on the US Global War on Terrorism and the ongoing conflict in Mindanao.

B. PHILIPPINE-AMERICAN MUTUAL DEFENSE TREATY

The sole foundation of RP-US security relations and the principal basis of the Balikatan series of military exercises is the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty. The MDT aims to provide mutual military assistance in case of an armed attack against either of the parties. To ensure interoperability and a well-coordinated operation when the need arises, the AFP and the US Armed Forces from time to time conduct military exercises within Philippine territory. Under Article 2 of the MDT, both parties would “separately and jointly by self-help and mutual aid . . . maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.”³⁰ As part of their mutual responsibilities under the terms of the MDT, these exercises help to upgrade the capacity of the AFP in case it is called upon to fulfill its obligation to engage in battles related to attacks on US property or territory. In addition, these exercises provide the United States the opportunity to train its forces in the Philippines for greater operability in similar terrain. Furthermore, the joint nature of these activities provides a confidence-building atmosphere and facilitates the flow of information. Lastly, these exercises sustain defense and security relations, both in the region and bilaterally.

Circumstances in the late 1980s that led to the closure of US military bases affected Philippine-American security relations. The Philippine Senate's rejection of the proposed Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Security strained Philippine-American relations, but both countries decided to keep the 1951 MDT. In the aftermath of its forces, the US significantly downgraded its political and military relations with the Philippines by declaring that the US could no longer guarantee the external defense of the Philippines since American forces had lost a facility from which to operate.³¹ The Mischief Reef incident of 1995 challenged the 1951 MDT. The People's Republic of China constructed

³⁰ “Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America”; Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, available from <http://www.dfa.gov.ph/vfa/frame/frmmtdt.htm>, accessed on 27 September 2005.

³¹ Renato C. De Castro, “The Revitalized Philippine-US Security Relations: A Ghost from the Cold War or an Alliance for the 21st Century,” *Asian Survey*, November/December 2003, 976.

structures that featured guard posts, helipads, and satellite antennas at Mischief Reef, which part of the Spratly Islands located 50 miles west of Palawan, the Philippines' nearest land mass, and 620 miles southeast of China.³² According to Leszek Buszynski, the Philippines had sought an American commitment to their defense, but the US side pointed to Article 5 of the MDT, which states that “an armed attack on either of the parties is deemed to include an armed attack on the metropolitan territory of either of the Parties, or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific or on its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific.”³³ According to International Boundary Consultants, the term “Pacific Area” was left ambiguous in the defense treaty. Washington interpreted the treaty as applying to the territory of the Philippines at the time the treaty was signed, which would exclude all of the Spratly Islands.³⁴ The Philippines first declared its claim to the Spratly Islands with a 1978 Presidential Decree.

In response to the emerging threats of the rise in transnational terrorism, and particularly the activities of al Qaeda, the ASG, and the hostage-taking situations involving American citizens, the Philippines and the United States have renewed their security cooperation. The US government provided counterterrorism assistance to the Philippines in the form of reconditioned military equipment and increased frequency of military exercises. In 2002, Balikatan 02-1 was conducted to assist the AFP in its operations against the Abu Sayyaf. However, this counterterrorism cooperation was challenged by Filipino nationalists on its constitutionality. In a privileged speech, Philippine Party-List Representative Satur Ocampo claimed that under the Arroyo administration, the Philippine government and US officials routinely invoke the MDT and the VFA to justify the series of Balikatan exercises.³⁵ He maintained that the MDT and the VFA explicitly provide only for joint military actions and training exercises aimed at defending the Philippines from external aggression. Ocampo argues that the

³² Mischief Reef is also called Panganiban Reef by the Philippines.

³³ Leszek Buszynski, “Realism, Institutionalism, and Philippine Security,” *Asian Survey*, May/June 2002, 496.

³⁴ “American Defense Commitments,” International Boundary Consultants, 15 August 1998, available from <http://www.boundaries.com/US-Asia.htm>, accessed on 2 October 2005.

³⁵ Satur Ocampo, “On the Continued Presence of US Troops in the Philippines,” Privileged Speech at Philippine Congress, 05 August 2002, available from http://bayanmuna.net/legislation/priv_spch/12th_Cong/10-US_troops.htm, accessed on 7 October 2005.

ASG is clearly an internal security problem, not an external aggressor. On the other hand, former Ambassador to Washington Raul Rabe says that given the Abu Sayyaf links to the al Qaeda network, the aggression could be easily considered an “external armed attack.”³⁶

C. MILITARY BASES AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE AGREEMENT

Prior to the signing of the MDT in 1951, the first Philippine-US security arrangement were the Military Bases Agreement and the Military Assistance Agreement, both signed in 1947. The MBA gave the US access to Philippine bases for a lease period of 99 years. The US retained control of 23 military installations, including Clark Air Base and the extensive naval facilities at Subic Bay. One of the controversies surrounding the US bases revolved around issues of jurisdiction and base rights. The US, rather than Philippine authorities, retained full jurisdiction over the territories covered by the military installations, which including collecting taxes and trying offenders (including Filipinos) in cases involving US service personnel. This agreement was also linked to MAA, which provided for the transfer of US surplus equipment after World War II. In addition, the MAA established the Joint United States Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) to advise and train the AFP. One of the most notable US supports to the Philippines was the military aid which was used to support and reorganize the Philippine Constabulary in the face of growing internal unrest during the Huk rebellion in late 1947.³⁷

The 1947 MBA was amended in 1979, updated in 1983, and terminated in September 1991. The US maintained that the military bases in the Philippines were vital for power projection in the western Pacific, Indian Ocean, and Middle Eastern theaters and wanted indefinite access to both facilities. The extension of US base rights became a pivotal issue in Philippine politics and the continuing US military presence in the Philippines after the Cold War faced stiff opposition from Filipino nationalists. The nuclear issue also complicated matters. Article 2 of the Philippine Constitution states that “the Philippines, consistent with national interest, adopts and pursues a policy of freedom

³⁶ Florentino Chay Hofileña, “Signed, sealed & delivered,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Newsbreak, 31 January 2002, available from http://www.inq7.net/newsbrk/2002/jan/31/nbk_3-2.htm, accessed on 7 October 2005.

³⁷ The Huk Rebellion was a communist-led peasant uprising in central Luzon that came close to victory in 1950 but was subsequently defeated by a combination of advanced US weaponry supplied to the Philippine government and administrative reforms under the charismatic President Ramon Magsaysay.

from nuclear weapons in its territory.”³⁸ Interpreted strictly, this article challenged the US policy of never confirming or denying the presence of nuclear weapons at any specific location. In November 24, 1991, the last US Navy ship sailed out of Subic Bay and the US flag was finally lowered and the Philippine flag hoisted as a symbol of the resumption of Philippine jurisdiction and sovereignty over the military bases. Even with the termination of the 1947 MBA, the two countries remain defense allies under the 1951 MDT.

D. VISITING FORCES AGREEMENT

The US bases closure had a negative impact on RP-US relations. Joint exercises were suspended in 1996, when the Philippine Supreme Court ruled that a bilateral agreement ratified by the Philippine Senate was necessary before any joint exercises could take place. The two sides agreed to suspend large-scale military exercises until a formal agreement on the treatment of visiting US defense and military personnel was finalized. Before 1996, Balikatan exercises had been held almost every year since 1981. Despite these circumstances, the two nations have remained committed to the strategic objectives of the 1951 MDT. As this commitment would require regular military exercises between Philippine and US armed forces, both sides agreed to conclude an agreement to regulate the temporary visits of US defense and military personnel for military exercises. The VFA was negotiated for almost two years and eventually signed in 1998 and ratified by the Philippine Senate on May 27, 1999.

The VFA is a mechanism for regulating the circumstances and conditions under which US forces may visit the Philippines for bilateral military exercises. The VFA governs the entry and exit of US personnel and establishes the manner of disposing of criminal cases against any member who commits an offense in the Philippines.³⁹ The VFA also establishes a procedure for resolving differences that may arise between the two sides with regard to the provisions of the agreement. Although the VFA permits only joint exercises, there is fear in the Philippines that the agreement may be a pretext for the return of American bases. The VFA was regarded by anti-US groups as heralding the re-

³⁸ “Philippine Constitution of 1987,” Chan Robles Virtual Law Library, available from <http://www.chanrobles.com/philsupremelaw1.htm>, accessed on 27 September 2005.

³⁹ “Primer on the VFA,” Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, available from <http://www.dfa.gov.ph/vfa/frame/frmpri.htm>, accessed on 27 September 2005.

entrance of US troops into the Philippines a mere six years after their departure, but nevertheless passed the Senate with majority support.

Despite of the ratification of the VFA, anti-VFA advocates argue that it suffers from many flaws. Dr. Francisco Nemenzo, a professor of political science at the University of the Philippines, maintains that it is an affront to the Philippine Constitution because it grants extraterritorial rights to Americans, and it can involve the Philippines in unnecessary international conflicts.⁴⁰ Nemenzo cites Article II, Section 8 of the Philippine Constitution, which provides that “The Philippines, consistent with the national interest, adopts and pursues a policy of freedom from nuclear weapons in its territory.” Nemenzo argues that the VFA does not contain any clause authorizing teams of Filipino scientists and military officers to board every nuclear-capable aircraft and naval vessel to ensure that they are not carrying nuclear weapons. He states that this is imperative because of the no-nuclear policy in the Constitution. Nemenzo’s second argument pertains to extraterritoriality. He argues that as a sovereign nation, the Philippine government must have full jurisdiction over any person, citizen or visiting foreigner, who commits a crime on its territory. The VFA, he claims, obliges the Philippines to abdicate this right with respect to US soldiers and civilians who come here in connection with some undefined military activities. Nemenzo’s third objection pertains to the ambiguity of the VFA’s coverage. He states that the VFA talks of activities involving American and Filipino troops, but nowhere is the term “activities” defined. By leaving the term vague, he argues, the VFA allows the Americans to undertake any kind of military operations based in the Philippines, like launching missiles against neighboring countries or engaging in hot pursuit of suspected terrorists. Additionally, he asks that if military operations which constitute a blatant disregard of Philippine sovereignty are not what the agreement intended, why not insert a well defined statement of purpose? In support of Nemenzo’s arguments, BAYAN⁴¹, BAYAN MUNA⁴² and the

⁴⁰ Francisco Nemenzo, “What’s Wrong with the Visiting Forces Agreement?” National Defense College of the Philippines, 1998, available from <http://www.philsol.nl/A99a/VFA-Nemenzo-1.htm>, accessed on 27 September 2005.

⁴¹ BAYAN (Bagong Alyansang Makabayan) is an umbrella movement and broad alliance of church groups, peasant organizations, labor federations, youth and student movements, women’s groups, fisher folk, indigenous peoples, lawyers, health workers, and other professionals.

⁴² BAYAN MUNA is a national political party under the Philippine party-list system.

Public Interest Law Center,⁴³ filed a petition before the Philippine Supreme Court that there is absolutely no written agreement between the Philippines and the United States governing Balikatan 02-1. They argue that Balikatan 02-1 is not covered by the VFA contrary to the insistence of the Philippine government.⁴⁴ On the other hand, pro-VFA supporters argue that VFA is important to the Philippines, especially when the country is faced with security threats and short of funds for military modernization.⁴⁵ Since the US withdrawal in 1992, the Philippines has been engulfed by a sense of vulnerability which is heightened by China's encroachment into islets the Philippines holds in the Spratly islands in the South China Sea.

E. MUTUAL LOGISTIC SUPPORT AGREEMENT

To sustain the revitalized Philippine-American security cooperation, the Philippines and the United States signed the Mutual Logistic Support Agreement (MLSA). The MLSA is similar to the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which the US has with 76 other countries. ACSA provides the basic framework for cooperation in military logistic matters. This bilateral agreement provides for the exchange of logistic support, supplies and services on a reimbursable basis. The agreement does not in any way commit a country to any military action.⁴⁶ An ACSA allows US forces to exchange most common types of support, including food, fuel, transportation, ammunition, and equipment. According to Banlaoi, the Philippine defense establishment regards the MLSA as a defense-to-defense agreement designed to facilitate reciprocal transfer of logistics support between the Philippines and American forces. It is regarded as a serious implementation of the MDT and an effective reinforcement of the VFA. The Philippine defense department views the MLSA as a politically significant

⁴³ Public Interest Law Center is an organization of lawyers committed to the legal advocacy of causes of the exploited and oppressed and the prosecution/defense of public interest cases

⁴⁴ "Text of High Court pleading, re: VFA, Balikatan," BAYAN Public Information Department, 27 January 2002, available from <http://sfbay.indymedia.org/news/2002/01/114605.php>, accessed on 24 November 2005.

⁴⁵ Ivan Gan, "Bad Memories Haunt New Military Pact with US," *Asia Times Online*, 1998, available from <http://www.atimes.com/se-asia/AE26Ae01.html>, accessed on 28 September 2005.

⁴⁶ "Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement," Global Security Website, available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/acsa.htm>, accessed on 08 October 2005.

agreement that will strengthen the bonds of strategic partnership of the Philippines and the US in the light of the Philippines' support to the US-led antiterrorist campaign.⁴⁷

However, nationalist Filipino critics argue that the MLSA is an agreement that would allow the US to have a permanent military presence in the Philippines after the termination of the 1947 MBA. According to George Radics, since the MLSA allows the cross-servicing of US ships, planes, and troops in the Philippine soil, the US can enter any region of the country and receive the same type of services it would have on its own military bases, thereby effectively turning the Philippines into a huge military base.⁴⁸ In contradiction to these fears of US re-entry to the Philippines, Admiral Dennis Blair, former Commander of the US Pacific Command, stresses that the US is not establishing permanent bases in the Philippines and emphasizes that there is no need, intention or desire to have permanent bases in the Philippines such as the US had in the past.⁴⁹ To allay fears that the MLSA compromises the Philippines' security interest, Foreign Affairs Secretary Blas Ople points out that the MLSA does not commit the Philippines to participate in any conflict or war. He states that any decision to involve the Philippines in a conflict or a war would have to be made under existing laws, and nothing in the MLSA compels the Philippines to join any conflict or war. Ople stresses that the decision to go to war is made only with the concurrence of Philippine Congress. Furthermore, the MLSA can come into play in conjunction with an approved activity under the MDT, the VFA or the MAA.⁵⁰

F. CONCLUSION

In summary, the Philippine-American security relationship was again revitalized with the signing of the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement and the 2002 Mutual Logistic

⁴⁷ Rommel C. Banlaoi, "The War on Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Strategic Implications for Philippine-China-US Relations," China: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies of Zhonshan University, 8 January 2002.

⁴⁸ George Radics, Baylon. "Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Balikatan Exercises in the Philippines and the US War against Terrorism," Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs, 2004, available from <http://www.stanford.edu/group/sjeaa/journal42/seasia1.pdf>, accessed on 8 October 2005.

⁴⁹ Transcript of Admiral Dennis Blair, Commander US Pacific Command, during his visit to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 31 January 2002, available from <http://www.pacom.mil/speeches/sst2002/020131zahidi.htm>, accessed on 8 October 2005.

⁵⁰ Press Release No. 288-02, Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, 27 November 2002, available from <http://www.dfa.gov.ph/news/pr/pr2002/nov/pr288.htm>, accessed on 8 October 2005.

Support Agreement. The two agreements are important to the serious implementation of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty, especially with the rise of transnational terrorism. The renewed Philippine-American security alliance was not achieved without difficulty. After the closure of the US military bases in the Philippines, Filipino nationalists, anti-US politicians, and leftist militants challenged the re-entry of US forces onto Philippine soil. Most of their arguments were based on Article 18 Section 25 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which provides that after the 1991 expiration of the 1947 Military Bases Agreement, “foreign military bases, troops, or facilities shall not be allowed in the Philippines except under a treaty duly concurred in by the Senate and, when the Congress so requires, ratified by a majority of the votes cast by the people in a national referendum held for that purpose, and recognized as a treaty by the other contracting State.”⁵¹ Accordingly, the VFA was signed by the two countries to allow continuation of the joint military exercises which are essential under the 1951 MDT. Additionally, the Mischief Reef incident played a major role in the Philippine Senate’s approval of the VFA. China’s continuing aggression in its claim to the Spratly Islands and the Philippine military’s weakness in defending its claimed territories led the Philippines to rely on the MDT for deterrence. However, VFA critics argue that the United States’ only interest in the South China Sea is freedom of navigation. As long as China does not threaten that freedom, the US will continue to remain uninvolved on the issues concerning the Spratly Islands. Moreover, the US does not consider the Spratly Islands to be covered by the MDT and the ratification of the VFA will not change this situation. It is only logical that the US will not go to war for the Philippines simply because an armada of Chinese warships is present in the reef.

The rise of terrorism incidents alarmed the international community, particularly the Abu Sayyaf’s kidnapping of European tourists in Sipadan Island in Malaysia, followed by the hostage-taking in Palawan Island that involved three American citizens. Even before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the US was already training with the AFP to combat terrorism. The 9/11 incident, however, emphasized the necessity of increasing US efforts to help the Philippine military enhance its capabilities.

⁵¹ “1987 Philippine Constitution,” Chan Robles Virtual Law Library, available from <http://www.chanrobles.com/article18.htm>, accessed on 8 October 2005.

After the resumption of Balikatan exercises, along with the signing of the MLSA, Filipino anti-US activists objected that the MLSA is a ploy by the US to re-establish a permanent presence in the Philippines. A close look at the provisions of the MLSA clearly shows, in Article 4, “that no US military base, facility, or permanent structure shall be constructed, established, or allowed under this agreement.”⁵² The MLSA will enable reciprocal logistic support between the Philippines and the United States for the duration of approved activity undertaken under the MDT and the VFA. The MLSA will be beneficial for the Philippines and will enhance the AFP’s capability to address potential security threats, particularly in regards to the transfer of US military supplies and equipment.

In conclusion, Philippine-American security cooperation is again strong and improving. Dissenting opinions can be expected from Filipino nationalists, leftist politicians and anti-US militants who will voice their objections. This is a part of the democratic process--the freedom of expression. However, those critics must acknowledge that to counter the emergence of transnational terrorism, a closer cooperation among states should be emphasized. Through bilateral and multilateral security agreements, a more robust effort can be achieved, not only to combat terrorism, but also to develop peace and stability in different parts of the world.

⁵² “Mutual Logistics Support Agreement,” available from <http://www.yonip.com/main/articles/mlsa.html>, accessed on 8 October 2005.

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III. RP-US BALIKATAN 02-1: BACKGROUND, OUTCOME, AND LESSONS

A. INTRODUCTION

In early 2002, US military advisers arrived in Mindanao to train and assist the Philippine military in fighting the Abu Sayyaf Group in a non-combat capacity. Balikatan 02-1 was a joint military exercise with the purpose of improving Philippines and US combined planning, combat readiness and interoperability. The exercise was envisioned to enhance security relations and demonstrate US resolve to support the Philippines against external aggression and terrorism through training in joint combined operations and the conduct of other related activities consistent with the Mutual Defense Treaty.⁵³

Once the exercise was made known to the Philippine public, many Filipinos voiced their objections. Some alleged that the exercise was unconstitutional, while others feared that US involvement in Mindanao would aggravate the security condition in Mindanao similar to what had happened in Vietnam. The joint military exercise was also protested by many anti-US groups as a renewed phase of US military intervention in the Philippines.⁵⁴ Questions were raised about the legality of the presence of US troops in war-torn Mindanao, which was viewed as contrary to the provisions of the Philippine Constitution banning the conduct of military operations by foreign troops on Philippine soil. Filipino critics, mostly belonging to leftist and anti-US organizations, argued that the Balikatan exercise series served as a perfect opportunity to evade the potential controversy that would have otherwise been associated with the US Global War on Terrorism by allowing the US to enter the Philippines militarily under the guise of an annual, legally-substantiated operation.⁵⁵ Despite criticisms, there was also positive

⁵³ “Balikatan: Shouldering the Load Together,” Global Security Website, available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/Balikatan.htm>, accessed on 26 September 2005.

⁵⁴ Patricio Abinales, “American Military Presence in Southern Philippines: A Comparative Historical Overview,” Hawaii: East-West Center, 2004, available from <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/stored/pdfs/PSwp007.pdf#search=Balikatan%20021>, accessed on 26 September 2005.

⁵⁵ George Baylon Radics, “Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Balikatan Exercises in the Philippines and the US ‘War against Terrorism,’” National University of Singapore (2004), available from <http://www.stanford.edu/group/sjeaa/journal42/seasia1.pdf>, accessed on 26 September 2005.

support from the Philippine public. According to the Social Weather Survey, “most Filipinos are satisfied with the US help to the AFP in fighting the Abu Sayyaf; however, divided regarding the size of benefit to the Philippines from the Balikatan exercises; and one-half would like the US soldiers to go to other combat zones aside from the Abu Sayyaf zones.”⁵⁶ Abinales also maintains that “popular approval for Balikatan 02-1 came not only from Christian Filipinos; over sixty percent of Mindanao Muslims also supported the exercise.”⁵⁷

This chapter provides a background on the conflict in Mindanao prior to the conduct of Balikatan 02-1; discusses what factors motivated the governments of the Philippines and the US to conduct the exercise in Mindanao; and examines the legal framework of Balikatan 02-1; the proceedings and outcomes of the joint military exercise. Furthermore, this chapter assesses the conduct of the RP-US Balikatan 02-1 and determines its successes and failures using five measures of effectiveness: (1) its contribution to the professionalization of the AFP, (2) the degree of transparency during the planning and execution of the exercise, (3) the inclusion of relevant stakeholders in Mindanao, (4) the effectiveness of the humanitarian and civic action projects, and (5) the support given by the Philippine civil society. This chapter also focuses on how future Balikatan exercises may be conducted to sustain security in Mindanao. The main argument is that Balikatan is a potential tool for building peace in Mindanao by creating a sense of security in that region. Capitalizing on the successes of Balikatan 02-1 and simultaneously addressing its failures can help it promote sustainable security in Mindanao. In this thesis, sustainable security can be understood as a process of addressing current traditional and non-traditional security threats, while developing and maintaining mechanisms and structures designed to meet future security challenges based on people-centered security, good governance, security sector reform, and a continuing dialogue. The standard by which one measures sustainable security is the existence of

⁵⁶ “75% Approve of US Soldiers In Combat Zones; 60% Say They Should Stay As Long As Needed,” SWS Media Release. *Social Weather Survey* (2002,) available from <http://www.sws.org.ph/pr020419.pdf>, accessed on 28 September 2004.

⁵⁷ Patricio Abinales, “American Military Presence in Southern Philippines: A Comparative Historical Overview,” *East-West Center Working Paper; Politics and Security Series No.7* (2004), 2, <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/stored/pdfs/PSwp007.pdf#search='Balikatan%20021>, accessed on 26 September 2005.

four core institutions, namely: a competent domestic police force and corrections system, an efficient and functioning civil service or professional bureaucracy, an independent judicial system that works under the rule of law, and a professional and disciplined military accountable to a legitimate civilian authority.⁵⁸

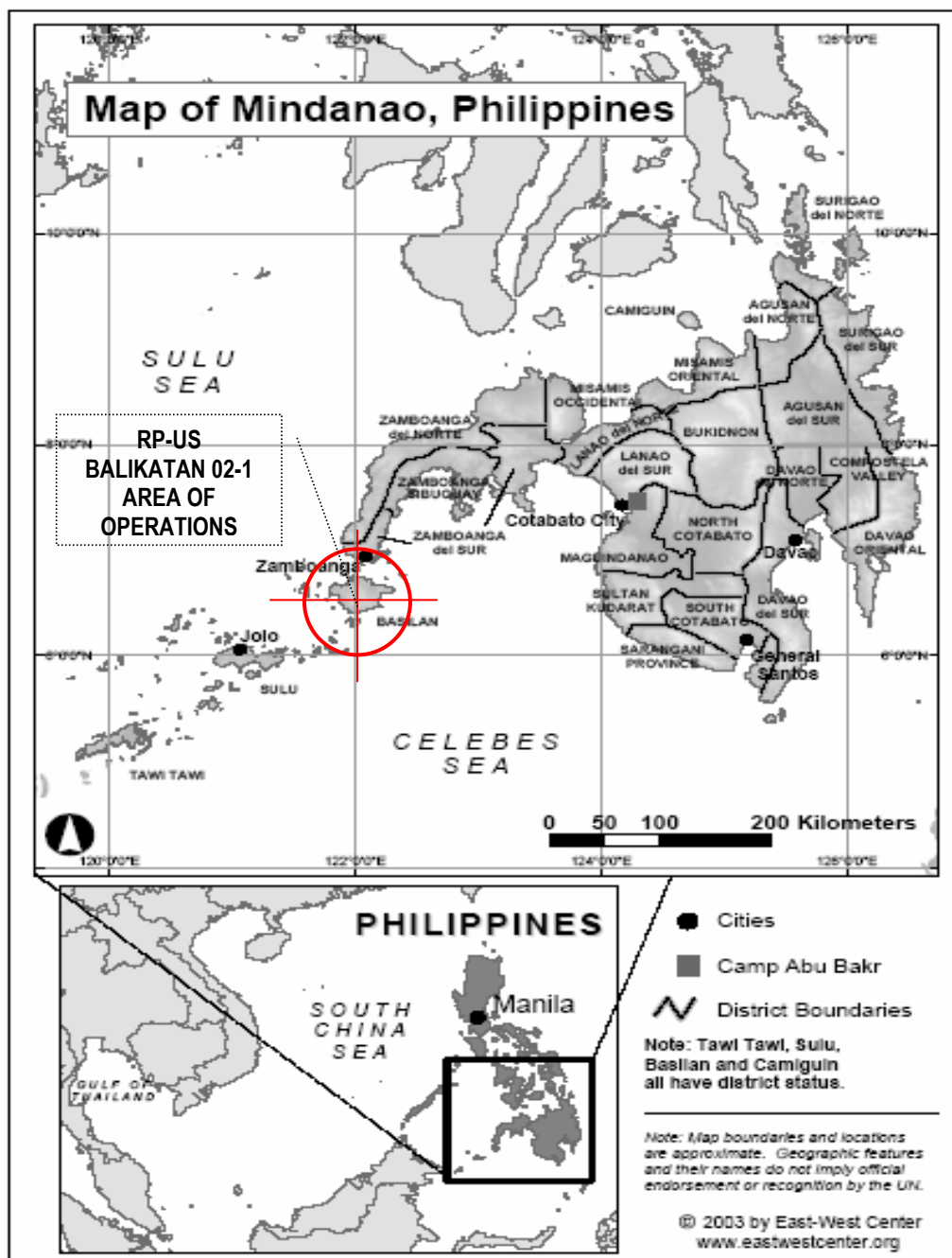
B. THE CONFLICT IN MINDANAO

Mindanao is the second largest and southernmost island in the Philippines.⁵⁹ It is considered the home of the country's Muslim population and has a current population of about 18 million. In 1903, the Muslims in Mindanao make up 76 percent of the population; however, it had declined to only 19 percent by 1990. At the village level, one will mostly find homogenous ethnic communities but at the regional, provincial and municipal levels, there is multi-ethnicity. Additionally, Muslim ethnic groups in Mindanao speak related languages, and practice many customs that are similar. Many Muslim ethnic communities live in close proximity to Christian and other non-Muslim Filipino indigenous groups called lumads. However, these Muslim ethnic groups remain separate from the majority in the Philippine nation-state not only by religion but also by the presence of political movements animated by the idea of belonging to a separate Moro nation called Bangsamoro.⁶⁰ The island group of Mindanao encompasses six administrative regions which are further subdivided into 25 provinces, of which only four are not on Mindanao Island itself. The island group includes the Sulu Archipelago, Basilan, Jolo, and Tawi-Tawi, plus outlying islands in other areas such as Camiguin, Dinagat, Siargao, Samal, and the Sarangani Islands (see Map 3).

⁵⁸ Pauline H. Baker and Angeli E. Weller, "An Analytical Model of Internal Conflict and State Collapse," *The Fund for Peace*, 1998.

⁵⁹ There are three major island groups in the Philippines and the largest is Luzon located at the northern part of the archipelago, followed by Mindanao, and Visayas at the central part of the country.

⁶⁰ "Social Assessment of Conflict-Affected Areas in Mindanao," The World Bank, Philippine Post-Conflict Series #1, 3 March 2003, 7-9, available from [http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/67ByDocName/Socialassessmentconflict-AffectedAreasinMindanao/\\$FILE/Mindanao.pdf](http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/67ByDocName/Socialassessmentconflict-AffectedAreasinMindanao/$FILE/Mindanao.pdf), accessed on 23 October 2005.



Map 3. Mindanao, Southern Philippines [From: <www.eastwestcenter.org>, Accessed December 2005]

1. The Conflict during Colonial Period

The arrival of Islam in Mindanao predated the arrival of Spaniards in the 16th century when Muslim traders from today's Indonesia and Malaysia came to the islands to barter their merchandise. The Muslim traders were responsible for the inhabitants' conversion to Islam, as well the formation of the Muslim Sultanates in the western part of Mindanao.⁶¹ In 1565, Spain colonized the northern and central archipelago. Large areas of the Muslim south remained largely untouched by western rule until the arrival of the Americans in 1898, whereupon most of the islands were brought under central control, although hostility and conflict remained endemic.⁶² For the whole duration of Spanish rule, uncolonized indigenous populations of Mindanao fought to preserve their culture and traditions.

After the Spanish-American War and under the 1898 Treaty of Paris, Spanish authorities ceded the Philippines to the Americans for 20 million American dollars. After approval by the US Congress, the treaty formally converted the status of the Philippines from Spanish possession to American colony. In August 1899, the US sent Brigadier General John Bates to Sulu to negotiate a treaty with Sultan Jamalul Kiram II. An agreement was reached wherein sovereignty of the United States over the Sulu archipelago and its dependencies was acknowledged by the Sulu Sultan. On the other hand, the US pledged to respect the authority of the Sultan and also guaranteed complete protection for him and his clan leaders, agreeing as well not to interfere in the prevailing Muslim or Moro's practice of their religion and their customs.⁶³

In the early part of twentieth century, substantial Christian settlement began to increase in Mindanao as corporate investments in agriculture, logging, mining and the production of export products gained headway within the second decade of American

⁶¹ Salvatore Schiavo-Campo and Mary Judd, "The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines: Roots, Costs, and Potential Peace Dividend," *Social Development Paper: Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Paper No. 24* (February 2005), 1-2, [http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/67ByDocName/TheMindanaoConflictinthePhilippinesRootsCostsandPotentialPeaceDividend/\\$FILE/WP24_Web.pdf](http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/67ByDocName/TheMindanaoConflictinthePhilippinesRootsCostsandPotentialPeaceDividend/$FILE/WP24_Web.pdf), accessed on 20 October 2005.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Sidney Glazer, "Moros as a Political Factor in Philippine Independence," *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 14/1 (1941), 78-90, available from JSTOR Database, accessed on 23 October 2005.

rule.⁶⁴ As a result, migration from Luzon and Visayas to Mindanao began to increase as more people arrived to work for American industries. Initially, the Muslims in Mindanao were comfortable with the arrangements, but when more American troops were deployed in Mindanao to occupy ports in the region, it aroused insecurities among the Moros, particularly in regard to their practice of religion and way of life. Soon their grievances exploded into violence when some Muslims attacked American soldiers after the Americans imposed customs regulations, collected taxes, surveyed lands, conducted census, and more importantly, forbade the Moro practice of slavery. The bloodiest encounter between the Americans and the Moros occurred on March 1906 during the battle of Bud Dajo in Sulu. After two days of fierce fighting about 1,000 Moros, including women and children were slaughtered. Only six survived, while the American forces suffered 21 killed and 73 wounded. Another major military encounter was the battle of Bud Bagsak, Sulu, on June 11 through 15, 1913 over the issue of the disarmament policy which the Moros vigorously resisted, saying they would never surrender their firearms. Brigadier General John Pershing led the American troops and after five days of combat action, 500 Moros were annihilated, with 14 Americans killed and 13 others wounded.⁶⁵ Muslim hostility was interpreted as a challenge to American sovereignty and as a result, US governance in Mindanao shifted from non-interference to direct rule with the establishment of the Moro Province.⁶⁶

The Philippine Bill of 1902, which provided for eventual independence, prompted the Americans to abandon the policy of indirect rule. Also, the new policy for direct rule was envisioned as preparing for the integration of the Moros into a modern political body.⁶⁷ When the US government promised to grant independence to the Filipino people, Muslim leaders in Mindanao filed their opposition to incorporation under the new

⁶⁴ Eleanor Dictaan-Bang-oa, "The Question of Peace in Mindanao, Southern Philippines," in *Beyond the Silencing of the Guns*, eds. Chandra K. Roy, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, and Amanda Romero-Medina, (Baguio City, Philippines, Tebtebba Foundation, 2004), 154.

⁶⁵ Federico V. Magdalena, "The Peace Process in Mindanao: Problems and Prospects," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1997), 245-259.

⁶⁶ Salah Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation under Endless Tyranny*, 3rd ed. (Kuala Lumpur: IQ Marin SDN BHD), 65.

⁶⁷ Peter G. Gowing, "Muslim-American Relations in the Philippines," in *The Muslim Filipinos: Their History, Society and Contemporary Problems*, eds. Peter G. Gowing and Robert McAmis, (Manila: Solidaridad, 1974), 34-36.

Philippine republic, while Christian Filipino leaders insisted that Mindanao was inseparable from the Philippines. In 1935, the Philippine Commonwealth was established as the last stage toward independence. In reaction, 90 Moro leaders gathered in Dansalan (now Marawi City) on March 18, 1935 and passed a strongly-worded manifesto pleading with US President Franklin D. Roosevelt to exclude Mindanao and Sulu in the grant of independence to the Filipinos.⁶⁸ However, the Americans did not give due consideration to the request and despite the various petitions and protests by Muslim leaders, Moro Province became part of the Philippine territory.

2. The Conflict after Independence

After Philippine independence in 1946, a deliberate policy of resettlement was implemented by the central government in Manila to populate empty areas in Mindanao, as well to serve as a deterrent to the spread of Islam.⁶⁹ The resettlement of Christians from the islands of Luzon and Visayas eventually resulted in having a Christian majority in Mindanao overall, with Muslim-majority areas concentrated only in the central and southwestern regions. The political and economic integration of Mindanao in the long term resulted in Muslim marginalization.

As internal migration from the north to the south increased, animosities among Christians and Muslims in Mindanao also deepened due to intrusions by Christian settlers into Muslim lands. Sporadic conflicts between Muslim and Christian arose over land which was apparently sold to Christians by the Muslims but later repossessed by the latter when the farms were seen productive. Resistance to settlers later led to armed conflicts.⁷⁰ In addition to the conflicts in Mindanao, insurgent activities of the communist-dominated Huks also erupted in Luzon. The Huks resorted to violence to achieve land reform and gain political power. With US military assistance, the Philippine government put an end to the insurgency. The Philippine government implemented a relocation program for

⁶⁸ Abhoud Syed M. Lingga, "Understanding Bangsamoro Independence as a Mode of Self-determination," (2003), available at http://www.bangsamoro.com/bmoro/moro_newformula.php, accessed on 20 October 2005.

⁶⁹ Erlinda M. Burton, "The Quest of the Indigenous Communities in Mindanao, Philippines: Rights to Ancestral Domain," *Research Institute for Mindanao Culture*, (May 2003), 10-15, [http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/e06a5300f90fa0238025668700518ca4/9e44622ad80e6c2ac1256d25004c0820/\\$FILE/G0314167.pdf](http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/e06a5300f90fa0238025668700518ca4/9e44622ad80e6c2ac1256d25004c0820/$FILE/G0314167.pdf), accessed on 20 October 2005.

⁷⁰ Burton, "The Quest of the Indigenous Communities in Mindanao, Philippines: Rights to Ancestral Domain," 16.

former members of the Huk movement, which included the awarding of government-owned lands in Mindanao so that the former rebels could start a new life.⁷¹ The arrival of former Huks and ex-soldiers proceeded inexorably as public lands were made available. Many of the lands in Mindanao were considered public lands because Moros did not have formal titles to claim ownership. The massive influx of Christian settlers from the north further created bitter conflicts in land distribution and ownership among Christian Filipinos and Moros.

By the end of the 1960s, Muslim grievances had grown into a full-fledged organized separatist movement. Among the immediate critical events that led to the formation of an organized front and war for secession was the Jabidah massacre of March 18, 1968. The Jabidah Special Forces, composed of Moro recruits, were undergoing training in unconventional warfare on Corregidor Island with the alleged aim of seizing the disputed Malaysian state of Sabah under a plan code-named “Operation Merdeka.”⁷² The Moro recruits were allegedly shot for refusing to obey orders and to keep them from revealing details of the operation.⁷³ Two months after the alleged execution of the Moro recruits, Datu Udtog Matalam, the governor of Cotabato and one of the most prominent Moro Datu politicians, founded the Muslim (later Mindanao) Independence Movement (MIM) and called for the creation of an ideal Islamic state. At the height of the Philippine-Malaysian dispute on Sabah and the 1968 Jabidah incident, some members of the MIM underwent guerilla training in Sabah. These men reportedly formed the core of

⁷¹ Lawrence M. Greenberg, “The Hukbalahap Insurrection: A Case Study of a Successful Anti-Insurgency Operation in the Philippines, 1956-1955,” *Historical Analysis Series* (US Army Center of Military History, 1987), <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/coldwar/huk/huk-fm.htm>, accessed on 20 October 2005.

⁷² “Operation Merdeka” was a secret project that recruited young Muslims for a private army. Some 180 Moro recruits were trained in techniques of infiltration, sabotage, and jungle survival. It later dominated Philippine headlines when reports spoke of a mutiny in the camp wherein 14 trainees were shot dead and 17 were missing. A survivor, Jibin Arula, said the trainees protested about the non-payment of the ₱50 monthly allowance and wanted to resign. They were told they could resign but could not leave the island; they were later shot while being escorted to the airstrip below the camp. Four separate Congressional and military inquiries failed to unearth the real story. Senate investigators received a document from an unknown source saying Merdeka was conceived as a plan to take Sabah by a contingent of civilian volunteers but under armed forces control. According to this theory, the recruits realized the nature of their mission and refused to fight fellow Muslims across the Sulu Sea, and thus precipitated the mutiny and the subsequent shooting.

⁷³ Graham H. Turbiville Jr., “The Bearer of the Sword,” *Military Review* (2002), 42, <http://www.leavenworth.army.mil/milrev/download/English/MarApr02/turbiville.pdf>, accessed on 20 October 2005.

the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). After the declaration of martial law in 1972, the Muslim movement took an armed revolutionary approach to the struggle of establishing the Bangsamoro⁷⁴ Islamic State. Among the young leaders of this movement was Nur Misuari, a professor at the University of the Philippines, who later emerged as the recognized leader of the Muslim struggle for independence.

From 1972 to 1976, the Moros fought a war of attrition against the Philippine government resulting in thousands of deaths on both sides. The fighting that ensued was considered the most serious threat to the security of the state and the bloodiest fighting in the Philippines since World War II. It reached its peak and a stalemate in 1975. The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) urged the Philippine government to pursue a political and peaceful solution through negotiation with Muslim leaders, and particularly the representatives of the MNLF.⁷⁵ Peace negotiations were held from 1977 to 1979 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and Tripoli, Libya with the OIC as the mediating body. On December 23, 1976, the Tripoli Agreement was signed, highlighting the establishment of Muslim autonomy. However, the implementation of the agreement failed when President Marcos “unilaterally issued Proclamation No. 1628 (followed up in 1979 by Presidential Decree No. 1618) which resulted in the creation of two autonomous governments for Regions IX (Central Mindanao) and XII (Western Mindanao) which the MNLF rejected.”⁷⁶

By the end of the 1970s, MNLF strength declined, with its troops dispersed and in disarray. Many MNLF rebels surrendered after the Philippine government offered inducements and rewards. The MNLF also suffered from political and ideological problems that caused divisions along ethnic lines. The movement ultimately divided in 1977 whereupon a more Islamic-oriented group – the Moro Islamic Liberation Front

⁷⁴ The term *Bangsamoro* comes from the Malay word *bangsa*, meaning *nation* or *people*, and the Spanish word *moro*, from the older Spanish word *Moor*, the Reconquista-period term for Arabs or Muslims. Bangsamoro covers the provinces of Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Cotabato, South Cotabato, Davao del Sur, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi. It also includes the southern portion of the province of Palawan.

⁷⁵ Soliman M. Santos Jr., “Delays in the peace negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front: Causes and Prescriptions,” East-West Center Washington Working Papers No.3 (January 2005), 3.

⁷⁶ Santos, “Delays in the peace negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front: Causes and Prescriptions,” 3.

(MILF) was formed.⁷⁷ The MNLF weakened and its capacity to continue the struggle was significantly reduced, thus generating an incentive for them to seek an agreement with the Philippine government.⁷⁸

3. The Conflict after Democratization in 1986

In 1985, President Marcos made a surprising announcement of a snap election in the following year and the growing opposition movement fielded Corazon Aquino as their presidential candidate. The elections were held on February 7, 1986 and were marred by widespread reports of violence and tampering of election results. The National Assembly declared the election in favor of Marcos; however, Cory Aquino refused to concede defeat and called on her followers to a protest rally the next day. Tensions grew with civil disobedience and general strikes held as a symbol of protest against Marcos' continuing rule. The Philippine military under the leadership Lieutenant General Fidel Ramos and Defense Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile called on Marcos to resign and by the morning of February 25, almost the entire armed forces had deserted Marcos in support of Cory Aquino. In the afternoon, angry crowds began to gather outside the Presidential Palace and at that evening, Marcos and his family fled the Philippines.⁷⁹

With the newly regained democracy, the MNLF entered into peace negotiations with the new government of President Corazon Aquino that eventually led to the creation of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the establishment of its first regional government in 1990.⁸⁰ However, the security situation in Mindanao was further complicated when another group broke away from the MNLF and formed the Abu Sayyaf Group in the early 1990s. The Abu Sayyaf was led by Moros who fought in Afghanistan during the Soviet war and were students of radical Islamic teachings. The group's first recorded operation was an attack on a military checkpoint in Basilan Island

⁷⁷ Jacques Bertrand, "Peace and Conflict in the Southern Philippines: Why the 1996 Peace Agreement is Fragile," *Pacific Affairs* (Spring 2000), 41.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁷⁹ "Lakas ng Bayan," The People's Power/EDSA Revolution 1986, available from <http://www.ualberta.ca/~vmitchel/fw9.html>, accessed on 07 November 2005.

⁸⁰ Santos, "Delays in the Peace Negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front: Causes and Prescriptions," 3.

in 1991, followed by a series of kidnappings and attacks between 1993 and 1995. In April 1995, Abu Sayyaf conducted its first large scale operation when it raided and burned the town of Ipil in Mindanao.⁸¹

In 1996, an internationally brokered peace agreement was signed by the Philippine government and the MNLF in Jakarta, Indonesia. The 1996 Jakarta Accord consisted of a “three-year extendible transitional Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), under the Office of the President, to give the MNLF the necessary exposure and chance to prove itself over a 14-province Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD), and thereby prepare the ground for a new autonomous region and government with presumably expanded powers and territory but subject to specified constitutional processes.”⁸² From 1996 to the present, the MNLF has been at the helm of the regional government of the ARMM and some MNLF leaders have also successfully run for local government positions.

However, the 1996 final peace agreement did not end the war because two splinter groups, the MILF and the ASG, opposed the peace agreement and vowed to establish an Islamic state in Mindanao. The Philippine government, under the leadership of President Fidel Ramos, pursued negotiations with the MILF and exploratory talks were arranged in 1997. The MILF emphasized nine broad issues: ancestral domain, displaced and landless Moros, destruction of properties and war victims, human rights issues, social and cultural discrimination, corruption of the mind and moral fiber, economic inequities and widespread poverty, exploitation of natural resources, and agrarian related issues.⁸³ Furthermore, the MILF clamored for government recognition of its camps, calling for the

⁸¹ “Terrorist Group Files,” Dudley Knox Library, Naval Postgraduate School, available from <http://library.nps.navy.mil/home/tgp/asc.htm>, accessed on 27 October 2005.

⁸² Ibid., 4.

⁸³ Marites Dañguilan Vitug and Glenda M. Gloria, “Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao,” (Quezon City: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs, 2000), 146.

Philippine military to withdraw from these areas.⁸⁴ The Philippine government agreed to recognize some of the camps as “zones of peace and development.”⁸⁵

In the 1998 Philippine elections, Joseph Estrada, a movie actor, was elected as the new President. Estrada continued the peace program initiated by his predecessor; however, formal peace talks were only resumed in 1999. Military operations against the Abu Sayyaf complicated peace negotiations with the MILF, as it became difficult for the AFP to separate the ASG and the MILF because they were situated in the same locations. The ASG easily seek refuge in MILF controlled areas. During this time, violent engagements between the Philippine military and the MILF began to develop again, eventually leading to the declaration by President Estrada of an “all-out war” against the MILF.⁸⁶

On July 2000, the AFP overran MILF camps, which was considered a significant setback to the rebel group. However, contrary to expectations, the MILF did not fight in positional warfare to defend the camps, but abandoned the area, disbanded into small groups of guerillas and dispersed to the countryside.⁸⁷ The MILF organized and conducted a counterattack in several areas. Hashim Salamat, the chief of the MILF, took refuge in Malaysia and called on the Moro people to rise in a jihad.⁸⁸ While the AFP was conducting military offensive against the MILF, the ASG took 58 hostages, including a priest, several teachers and students in Basilan, and demanded ransoms. A little more than a month later, the ASG faction in Jolo took 21 hostages⁸⁹ from a Sipadan Diving Resort in Malaysia.⁹⁰ The hostages were later released after the Libyan government paid

⁸⁴ The MILF occupied 13 main camps and 33 minor encampments. Camp Abubakar was the biggest camp that served both as military encampment and a civilian community. The camp had a military academy, a prison, an arms manufacturing center, mosques, Shariah Courts, schools, multipurpose cooperatives eateries and a self-sustaining market. The camp served as the MILF’s headquarters until the Philippine military captured it in July 2000.

⁸⁵ R. J. May, “Muslim Mindanao: Four Years after the Peace Agreement,” *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2001), 270.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 272.

⁸⁷ Willem Wolters, “Muslim Rebel Movements in the Southern Philippines: Recruitment Area for al-Qaeda Terrorists?” *Focaal – European Journal of Anthropology*, No. 40, 2002, 159.

⁸⁸ May, “Muslim Mindanao: Four Years after the Peace Agreement,” 270.

⁸⁹ The hostages were composed of ten westerners, nine Malaysians, and two Filipinos.

⁹⁰ Maria Ressa, “Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of Al Qaeda’s Newest Center of Operation in Southeast Asia” (New York: Free Press Simon and Schuster, 2003), 112.

ransom in the amount of \$20 million. The Libyan money attracted thousands of Abu Sayyaf recruits and supporters, and financed the purchase of new arms and equipment.⁹¹ On May 27, 2001, the Abu Sayyaf kidnapped another group of 20 hostages, consisting of 17 Filipinos and three Americans, from the Dos Palmas resort on the Philippine island of Palawan and took them to their Basilan stronghold. One of the American hostages, Guillermo Sobero, was beheaded by the group and was later found in a shallow grave.⁹²

When President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo assumed the presidency after Estrada was pressured to vacate the position, she sought the assistance of the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir and Indonesian President Wahid to convince the MILF to resume the stalled negotiations. On March 24, 2001, the Philippine government and the MILF signed an agreement in Kuala Lumpur for the resumption of peace talks. Following the agreement forged in Kuala Lumpur, the MILF and the Philippine government declared a cessation of hostilities. A new agreement known as the Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001 was signed in Tripoli, Libya. It calls for discussion of three issues: security aspects and ceasefire, rehabilitation and development of conflict-affected areas, and ancestral domain.⁹³

In that same year, 37 MNLF leaders signed a resolution declaring a loss of confidence and withdrawing support from Nur Misuari as chairman of the MNLF and governor of the ARMM. They accused Misuari's leadership of being dictatorial, arrogant, divisive, and causing further disunity within the MNLF. During the Bangsamoro Congress in November 2001, Misuari became vocal, declaring that the 1996 Peace Agreement "is all but dead" and accusing the Philippine government of failing to give ARMM full autonomy and sufficient funding.⁹⁴ On the morning of November 19, 2001,

⁹¹ Online News Hour Report, "Profile: Abu Sayyaf," Public Broadcasting Service, January 2002, available from http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/abu_sayyaf.html, accessed on 27 October 2005.

⁹² "US Hostage Confirmed Dead," BBC News (12 October 2002), available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/1595098.stm>, accessed on 28 October 2005.

⁹³ Abhoud Syed M. Lingga, "Peace Process in Mindanao: The MILF-GRP Negotiations," Institute of Bangsamoro Studies, 7 February 2002, available from <http://www.yonip.com/main/articles/negotiations.html>, accessed on 28 October 2005.

⁹⁴ "The Security Situation in Mindanao," National Security Council Briefing Manuscript, 22 November 2001; available from <http://www.dfa.gov.ph/news/pr/pr2001/nov/armmsecurity.htm>, accessed on 28 October 2005.

200 members of Misuari's renegade group attacked a police station in Maimbung, Sulu and held hostage 17 police personnel. Afterwards, the group harassed the 104th Infantry Brigade of the Philippine Army in Jolo, Sulu. While the attacks were being carried out in Sulu, forces loyal to Misuari were massing at the MNLF's headquarters in Kabatangan Complex in Zamboanga City. In response, Philippine military forces bombed positions occupied by Misuari loyalists. As they tried to escape the bombardment, rebels snatched local residents from their homes and used them as shields. After the failure of the uprising, Misuari fled to Malaysia, where he was arrested by the Malaysian government and turned over to the Philippine government.

4. Conclusion

Although religious differences have partly shaped the conflict, its roots lie in the clash of interests over land and other natural resources, and the identity issues emerging from the second-class status of much of the Moro population during their integration into the Philippine republic. Furthermore, a combination of several variables also contributed to the worsening of the conflict in Mindanao; these include socioeconomic deprivation, political marginalization, government ineptitude, and corruption. Muslim grievances over land distribution and the lack of political representation resulting from colonial era policies have been the most fundamental concern of the Moros.

The emergence of the Abu Sayyaf as a terrorist group and its alleged links with Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah further complicated the peace process in Mindanao. The Philippine government seeks a peace agreement with the MILF while on the other hand, a "no negotiation" and "all-out-war" policy is being implemented against the Abu Sayyaf. In 2001, the United States offered assistance to the Philippine government in fighting Abu Sayyaf and by January 2002, US military advisers had arrived in Mindanao to train the Philippine military in a non-combat capacity under the aegis of the Balikatan exercise series.

C. BALIKATAN 02-1: TERMS OF REFERENCE AND INVOLVED PARTIES

In comparison with prior Balikatan exercises, begun in 1981, Balikatan 02-1 can be considered special in terms of its goals, objectives and activities. The goals, objectives and activities of previous Balikatan exercises focused on interoperability training against an external threat, while Balikatan 02-1, in addition to the interoperability training, also

involved the US in an advisory role in fighting the Abu Sayyaf Group. Past training exercises had been held in controlled environments on Luzon Island where insurgent threats are not imminent.⁹⁵ Balikatan 02-1 was held at the island of Basilan, the Philippines' hotbed of Islamic insurgency and extremism and the stronghold of the Abu Sayyaf Group. Furthermore, MILF forces are also situated in Basilan, and Philippine combat operations with US military assistance may have unexpectedly triggered hostilities with the MILF. Therefore, many Filipino critics feared the US military presence in Mindanao would derail the ongoing peace talks and force the MILF back to armed struggle for Muslim Mindanao independence.

The special conduct of Balikatan 02-1 raised questions about its legality, particularly the issue of US military presence in Mindanao where a Muslim secessionist movement has been ongoing for three decades. An American couple, together with other Filipino hostages, was held captive by the Abu Sayyaf during that time. The Philippine-American military cooperation in Mindanao was conducted under the veil of the existing bilateral military agreement. However, it was charged that the bilateral cooperation was contrary to the provision of the Philippine Constitution banning foreign troops from conducting military operations on Philippine soil. Filipino constitutionalists viewed the US military presence in Mindanao as a combat operation directed towards the ASG to rescue the American hostages, Martin and Gracia Burnham. Roland Simbulan, a professor at the University of the Philippines, argued that "all the existing security agreements of the Philippines and the United States (Mutual Defense Treaty, Military Assistance Agreement, Visiting Forces Agreement) do not have provisions for the deployment of foreign military forces, advisers, foreign military trainers or coordinators in actual combat operations."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ "Special Press Summary: Philippine-US Joint Exercises," Virtual Information Center, 25 April 2003, available from <http://www.vic-info.org/RegionsTop.nsf/0/54f689a93fad13d90a256d1300829df8?OpenDocument>, accessed on 28 October 2005.

⁹⁶ Roland G. Simbulan, "Renewed Phase of US Military Intervention in the Philippines," Philippines, in *Sentenary/Centennial: The Philippine Revolution and Philippine-American War*, 15 January 2002, available from <http://www.boondocksnet.com/centennial/sctexts/simbulan020115.html>, accessed on 28 October 2005.

Filipino critics, led by members of SANLAKAS⁹⁷ and Partido ng Manggagawa,⁹⁸ filed a case with the Philippine Supreme Court challenging the legality of Balikatan 02-1. The two political parties stressed that the Philippine Constitution prohibits the presence of foreign military troops or facilities in the country, except under a treaty duly concurred in by the Senate and recognized by the other country. They emphasized that the Philippines and the United States signed the 1951 agreement to provide mutual military assistance in accordance with the constitutional processes of each country only in the case of an armed attack by external aggressors. They argued that the ASG in Basilan does not constitute as an external armed force that has subjected the Philippines to an armed external attack warranting US military assistance under the 1951 MDT. They also contended that no treaties allow US troops to engage in combat, and that the VFA does not authorize US soldiers to engage in combat operations or even to fire back if fired upon.⁹⁹

1. Terms of Reference

The governments of the Philippines and the United States assert that the bilateral military cooperation is a joint military training exercise sanctioned under the Mutual Defense Treaty. In order to clear doubts and suspicions, a Terms of Reference (TOR) was executed to provide a framework that governing the conduct of Balikatan 02-1.¹⁰⁰ In this legal proceeding, the Philippine Supreme Court upheld the legality of Balikatan 02-1 and determined that the Balikatan 02-1 TOR rightly fell within the context of the VFA.¹⁰¹ In support of the legal proceeding, the Philippine Supreme Court based its decision on the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which contains provisos governing

⁹⁷ SANLAKAS is a multi-sectoral and party-list organization established to protect and advance the rights and welfare of the Filipino masses through their involvement in the mass movement.

⁹⁸ Partido ng Mangagawa (Filipino Workers Party) is a party-list organization viewed as a rejectionist Marxist-Leninist group.

⁹⁹ “Lim vs Macapagal-Arroyo,” Philippine Supreme Court Dissenting Opinion, available from http://www.supremecourt.gov.ph/jurisprudence/2002/apr2002/151445_kapunan.htm, accessed on 28 September 2005.

¹⁰⁰ Albert Del Rosario, “A Progress Report on the Philippines: The Balikatan Exercises, the Abu Sayyaf, and Al-Qaeda,” Heritage Foundation (2002), available from <http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=3492>, accessed on 27 September 2005.

¹⁰¹ “Lim vs Macapagal-Arroyo,” Philippine Supreme Court Decision, available from <http://www.supremecourt.gov.ph/jurisprudence/2002/apr2002/151445.htm>, accessed on 28 September 2005.

interpretations of international agreements. In relation to the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of the word “activities” as stated in provision of the VFA, the Philippine Supreme Court viewed that it was deliberately constructed to give both parties leeway in negotiation. In this manner, visiting US forces may sojourn in Philippine territory for purposes other than military. As conceived, the joint exercises may include training on new techniques of patrol and surveillance to protect the nation’s marine resources, sea search-and-rescue operations to assist vessels in distress, disaster relief operations, civic action projects such as the building of school houses, medical and humanitarian missions, and the like. Under these auspices, the VFA gives legitimacy to the current Balikatan exercises. It is only logical to assume that Balikatan 02-1 falls under the umbrella of sanctioned or allowable activities in the context of the agreement.

The Balikatan 02-1 TOR governing the US troops and Filipino soldiers was put in place to allay fears that the US military would engage in combat operations, considering that the exercise sites are near the combat zone areas in Basilan. This marked a departure from prior exercises in that lethal rules of engagement are involved. US forces could advise, assist and train Philippine units, but they would not engage in direct combat. US soldiers in the Philippines could engage in combat in acts of self-defense only if they came under attack.¹⁰²

The Balikatan TOR specified that it was an exercise to advise, assist, and train the Philippine military in its efforts against the Abu Sayyaf Group, to be conducted in Basilan and in Zamboanga. Related support activities were to be conducted in Cebu. It would be conducted and completed within a period of six months with the participation of 660 US personnel and 3,800 Philippine forces. Furthermore, only 160 US troops, organized in 12-man Special Operations Forces (SOF) teams, were to be deployed with the AFP field commanders. Most importantly, the US troops would not engage in combat operations, without prejudice to their rights to self-defense.¹⁰³

¹⁰² “Operation Enduring Freedom – Philippines,” Global Security.Org, available from http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/balikatan_02-1.htm, accessed on 18 October 2005.

¹⁰³ Del Rosario, “A Progress Report on the Philippines: The Balikatan Exercises, the Abu Sayyaf, and Al-Qaeda,” 2.

2. Involved Parties

The conduct of Balikatan 02-1 basically involved three major parties: the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, the United States Government, and the adversaries consisting of major threat groups from the southern Philippines secessionist movements and the communist New People's Army. The Philippine government policy since August 2000 has been constant military pressure on the ASG. In September 2000, the AFP committed over 1,500 troops into Jolo to conduct operations against ASG units that had kidnapped foreigners in Malaysia. Likewise, the AFP also sent troops to the island of Basilan after the hostage-taking in Palawan that included three Americans. The AFP operations were limited by several factors. One is the difficult terrain of the two islands. A second factor is the civilian support given to the ASG on Jolo and Basilan, and a third was the limited AFP equipment. A fourth limitation is the unevenness in the quality of the AFP, because several of its units were doubted to have colluded with the ASG. The fifth limitation was the hostage situation itself, because European governments pressured the Philippine government to refrain from excessive military operations while ASG held the European hostages. This constrained AFP from conducting air bombing, as well as from using artillery and mortars out of concern for the hostages' safety. Another limitation was the AFP's deployment of troops. Most of its forces in Mindanao are positioned in areas dominated by the MILF and MNLF. Only a small percentage of forces were committed against the ASG during that time. A final constraint was the danger of AFP operations producing large numbers of civilian casualties or displaced civilians. The Philippine government has opposed payment of ransom for hostages. However, the reality is that the government allowed the payment of ransom from hostages' families and from European governments through Libya in 2000.¹⁰⁴

a. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines

To combat terrorism in the Philippines, a national policy was formulated by the Arroyo administration that specifies the government's adherence to international covenants on terrorism. Also, as an active member of the United Nations, "the Philippines reaffirmed its commitment to prevent, suppress, counter all forms of terrorist

¹⁰⁴ Larry Niksch, "Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-US Anti-Terrorism Cooperation," CRS Reports for Congress, 25 January 2002, available from <http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RL31265.pdf>, accessed on 17 October 2005.

acts in accordance with the UN charter, resolutions and declarations, and other relevant international laws. It shall endeavor to work closely with the regional and international community, particularly with the ASEAN, the United States and other allies, in order to strengthen the global cooperation to combat international terrorism.”¹⁰⁵

The Philippine government national policy is articulated through the “Fourteen Pillars of Policy and Action Against Terrorism,”¹⁰⁶ namely:

1. Supervision and implementation of policies and actions of the government against terrorism
2. Intelligence coordination
3. Internal focus against terrorism
4. Accountability of public and private corporations and personalities
5. Synchronizing internal efforts with global outlook
6. Legal measures
7. Promotion of Christian and Muslim solidarity
8. Vigilance against the movement of terrorists and their supporters, equipment, weapons and funds
9. Contingency plans
10. Comprehensive security plans for critical infrastructure
11. Support of overseas Filipino workers
12. Modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police
13. Media support
14. Political, social and economic measures

The Philippine national policy on counterterrorism further specifies the government’s commitment to cooperate in the international struggle against terrorism by joining the international counter-terrorist coalition and work with the United Nations and the United States on intelligence and security matters concerning terrorism. The 14 Pillars seek to strengthen internal efforts against terrorism through delineation of responsibilities, modernization of the AFP and the police force, anticipation and

¹⁰⁵ “National Plan to Address Terrorism and Its Consequences,” Annex K to the Philippine National Internal Security Plan (NISP) (2002), 10.

¹⁰⁶ “Fourteen (14) Pillars of Policy and Action against Terrorism” as enumerated in Memorandum Order No. 31 dated October 12, 2001 by the Office of the President, in National Plan to Address Terrorism and Its Consequences, Annex K to the Philippine National Internal Security Plan (NISP) (2002).

preparation for future attacks, enlisting the cooperation of other sectors in the society such as the media, and addressing the varied underpinnings of terrorism. The Philippine government will also synchronize its internal efforts with the global war against terrorism.¹⁰⁷

b. The United States Government

To help the Philippines in combating terrorism, the United States government sent groups of military observers to Mindanao in October 2001 to assess AFP operations against the ASG and examine AFP equipment needs. President Bush extended military aid to the Philippines when President Arroyo visited Washington in November 2001, and he offered a direct US military role in fighting the Abu Sayyaf. However, President Arroyo insisted that the US military role should be advisory and that the AFP would retain full operational responsibility.¹⁰⁸ By late December 2001, AFP units on Mindanao began to receive US military equipment. In January 2002, it was announced that the US would deploy 650 troops to the southern Philippines, specifically to Zamboanga and Basilan within the month for training and advisory functions; and that some of these troops would accompany AFP units on Basilan. In committing troops, the US government reportedly wanted to avoid military involvement with the MILF. The Philippine government supported this position because it paralleled the government's policy of maintaining a ceasefire that was negotiated in 2001 with the MILF.¹⁰⁹ However, the ceasefire became shaky in February and March 2001 when fighting broke out at an MILF stronghold on Mindanao and as a result, US considered placing the MILF on its list of foreign terrorist organizations. However, the Philippine government convinced US officials not to take that action in the interest of preserving the ceasefire agreement.¹¹⁰

The United States government considers the Philippines a major center of antiterrorism efforts because of its strategic importance, concentrated Muslim population,

¹⁰⁷ "National Plan to Address Terrorism and Its Consequences," 7-10.

¹⁰⁸ James Brooke, "Philippines Said to Have Refused Bush Offer of G.I.'s in November," *New York Times*, 18 January 2002, available from Pro Quest Database, accessed on 28 October 2005.

¹⁰⁹ Niksch, "Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-US Anti-Terrorism Cooperation," 8.

¹¹⁰ Bruce Vaughn and others, "Terrorism in Southeast Asia," *CRS Report for Congress* (7 February 2005), 43, available from <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL31672.pdf>, accessed on 28 October 2005.

and insurgency movements. Based on its GWOT goals and priorities, the US has created a comprehensive counterterrorism and counterinsurgency policy package towards the Philippines, one that includes political, military, and economic aid components. Additionally, the US government has frozen the assets and funding base of listed foreign terrorist organizations (FTO) active in the Philippines, including Al-Qaeda, JI, ASG, and the CPP/NPA.¹¹¹ The US supports peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF that are currently mediated by Malaysia, pledging more development aid when a peace agreement is established. The United States Institute of Peace (USIP), an independent federal organization, is facilitating the dialogue to help create a durable peace agreement, acknowledging that regional peace is key to countering terrorism in the Philippines.¹¹²

According to the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, one of the US approaches to defeating terrorism is through the 4D strategy (Defeat, Deny, Diminish, and Defend), which calls for defeating organizations of global reach through the direct or indirect use of diplomatic, economic, information, law enforcement, military, financial intelligence, and other instruments of power.¹¹³ To accomplish this goal, United States seeks to identify, locate, and destroy these terrorist organizations. It is also the goal of the US to deny sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists by emphasizing the responsibilities of all states to combat terrorism both within their borders and internationally. America is willing to provide assistance to states willing to combat terrorism but without the means, but when states are reluctant or unwilling to deny support and sanctuary to terrorists, the US will “take appropriate steps to convince them to change their policies.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Raphael Perl, “Terrorism and National Security: Issues and Trends,” (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2 October 2003).

¹¹² Eugene Martin, “US Interest in the Philippine Peace Process,” Philippine Facilitation Project, United States Institute of Peace, available from http://www.usip.org/philippines/reports/mindanao_martin.html, accessed on 28 October 2005.

¹¹³ “National Strategy for Combating Terrorism,” 16, available from http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/counter_terrorism/counter_terrorism_strategy.pdf, accessed on 28 October 2005.

¹¹⁴ “National Strategy for Combating Terrorism,” 15-17.

c. The Insurgency Factions

The US designated four organizations in the Philippines as foreign terrorist organizations: the New People's Army, Abu Sayyaf Group, Jemaah Islamiyah, and Al Qaeda.¹¹⁵ The *New People's Army* was responsible for attacks against US military personnel and interests in the Philippines and in 1989, achieved one of its greatest accomplishments in assassinating Colonel James Rowe, the Chief of the Joint United States Military Advisory Group for the Philippines.¹¹⁶ The Abu Sayyaf Group was designated as a terrorist organization in 1997 and was re-designated again in 2001. The Abu Sayyaf was responsible for kidnapping 20 westerners, including four Americans, of which one was beheaded and only two survived. There is also evidence that Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah have been operating in the Philippines and allegedly have links with the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. It was reported that the MILF provide training camps to Al Qaeda and JI members, but MILF consistently denies this link and even condemns the activities of these groups as un-Islamic.

(1) The Communist New People's Army (NPA). Aside from the threat posed by the Islamic secessionist movements, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the political head of the NPA, also has called for attacks on American targets and claims responsibility for the murder of an American hiker and the firing on an American transport aircraft in January 2002 on the island of Luzon.¹¹⁷ The US government placed the CPP and the NPA on the official US list of terrorist organizations in August 2002. CPP/NPA aims to overthrow the government of the Philippines and opposes any US military presence in the country. Press reports in 1999 and in late 2001 indicated that the group was targeting US troops participating in joint military exercises as well as US Embassy personnel. The group has claimed responsibility for assassinations and expressed its intent to target US personnel in its operating areas. The CPP/NPA contends that Balikatan 02-1 is a direct US intervention in Philippine internal

¹¹⁵ Audrey Kurth Cronin and others, "Foreign Terrorist Organization," *CRS Report for Congress*, 6 February 2004, available from <http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RL32223.pdf>, accessed on 28 October 2005.

¹¹⁶ "Military Guide to Terrorism in the 21st Century," US Army Training and Doctrine Command (2004), 4-10, available from <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army/guidterr/ch04.pdf>, accessed on 28 October 2005.

¹¹⁷ "Travel Advisory," Embassy of the United States of America in Manila, available from <http://manila.usembassy.gov/wwwwhtrae.html>, accessed on 28 September 2004.

affairs. They maintain that it violates the sovereignty of the Philippines and claim that the US military presence in Mindanao on the pretext of solving the Abu Sayyaf problem is a “total surrender of the right of the Filipino nation to self-determination and its own resolution of internal matters.”¹¹⁸

What are the implications of Balikatan 02-1 for the Philippine communist insurgency? The CPP/NPA view is that the US involvement in the fight against the ASG will have deep long-term implications on the revolutionary movement. They believe that US security assistance to the Philippine government is a big obstacle to the continuation of peace talks between the Philippine government and National Democratic Front (NDF), which have continually stalled since the middle of 2001.

(2) The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The Southern Philippine Secessionist Movement is composed of two main groups, the *Moro Islamic Liberation Front* and the *Abu Sayyaf Group*. The MILF is considered the vanguard of the Islamic movement in Mindanao and the neighboring islands. It was formed in 1977 when it separated from the Moro National Liberation Front, which was advocating a more moderate and conciliatory approach toward the government. The MNLF signed an agreement relinquishing its goal of independence for Muslim regions and accepted the government's offer of autonomy. On the other hand, the MILF, then the second largest faction of the Southern Philippines Secessionist Movement, refused to accept the accord and initiated a brief offensive against the Philippine governments, later settling for a cessation of hostilities. In the 1990's the MILF launched a wave of terrorist attacks in the southern Philippines, compelling former President Estrada to pursue an “all-out war” against the organization in 1998. President Arroyo has resumed peace talks with the MILF since assuming office, and several ceasefires have been agreed upon, only to be broken in subsequent weeks or months. In May 2000, the GRP-MILF peace talks broke down, and the AFP launched a major assault on the MILF military headquarters at Camp Abubakar, capturing the camp. The offensive did not significantly harm the group's military capabilities, as most of its senior leaders had been evacuated before the camp fell. In response to the military offensive, the MILF countered with a series of bombings in Manila. A splinter group also claimed responsibility for a bomb attack against the

¹¹⁸ “CPP Primers on Balikatan,” Philippine Revolution Web Central, available from <http://www.philippinerevolution.org/pib/primers/primer.shtml>, accessed on 28 September 2005.

Philippine ambassador to Indonesia and a series of bombs that exploded in the capital. Testimony of captured JI leaders and other evidence point to strong links between the MILF and JI, including the continued training of JI terrorists in MILF camps.¹¹⁹ However, MILF leaders deny links with JI, although many reports link some local MILF commands with the terrorist organization.¹²⁰ It is also alleged that the MILF has had ties with al Qaeda beginning in the late 1980s, when they dispatched troops to Afghanistan for training. Later, the MILF opened their camps to al Qaeda trainers and members of JI, providing them training and sanctuary. For the MILF, it is a show of Islamic solidarity, as well as a precautionary measure should the peace process fail. But the Abu Sayyaf Group has taken advantage of this, having moved into MILF-controlled regions. In some instances, it was alleged that ASG members perpetrate terrorist activities with the help of MILF or JI members. The Philippine government downplays this triangular relationship for fear of upsetting the peace process with the MILF. During the conduct of Balikatan 02-1, the MILF spokesman, Eid Kabalu, announced that it had no plans to disrupt the exercise provided that US and Philippine troops did not enter MILF areas.¹²¹ However, the MILF warned that the military's sustained operations could lead to clashes with the MILF rebels and stated that the MILF would avoid encounters with government troops, but if engaged, would fight back.¹²²

(3) The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). The target of Filipino-American military cooperation is the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). It is a small, violent, faction-ridden Muslim group operating in the peripheries of Mindanao. It is considered the most radical of the Islamic separatist groups in the southern Philippines, with a record of killings and kidnappings and links with Al Qaeda. The origins of the ASG can be traced to Afghanistan when Moro fundamentalist numbering between 300 and

¹¹⁹ "Southern Philippines Background: Terrorism and the Peace Process," International Crisis Group Asia Report No. 80 (13 July 2004), 18, available from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2863&l=1>, accessed on 26 October 2005.

¹²⁰ "Moro Islamic Liberation Front," The Institute of Counterterrorism Website, available from http://www.ict.org.il/inter_ter/orgdet.cfm?orgid=92, accessed on 28 September 2005.

¹²¹ "Moro Group Raises Alarm Over US-RP Military Exercise in NorthCot," *Mindanews*, available from <http://moroinfo.com/relatednews64print.html>, accessed on 27 September.

¹²² "Philippines-United States: Combined Military Operations in the Philippine - Special Press Summary," Virtual Information Center, available from <http://www.vicinfo.org/RegionsTop.nsf/0/7d80738cebb75e4d0a256bd700823a65?OpenDocument>, accessed on 28 September 2005.

500 volunteered arrived in Pakistan to serve as mujahidins.¹²³ One of them was Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani who later organized the ASG in the early 1990s as an underground group that aims to propagate Muslim fundamentalism. Janjalani was originally a member of the Dahwa Jama't Tabligh, a fundamentalist group in Marawi City founded by Professor Amilhussein Jumaani and Abe Dologan of the Mindanao State University. Janjalani also studied Islamic Jurisprudence in Egypt, as well as Jihad and Islamic Revolution in Pakistan before volunteering to fight the Afghan War with the International Islamic Brigade in the 1980s. The ASG was originally known as the Mujahideen Commando Freedom Fighters and was first thought of as nothing more than a local (provincial) version of the MNLF and/or MILF, a breakaway faction of the former movement.¹²⁴ Janjalani's fundamentalist group was later renamed Al Harakut-ul Al Islamiyya (AHAI) meaning Islamic movement or the Abu Sayyaf Group in 1992.¹²⁵ Janjalani was given the alias "Abu Sayyaf" meaning "Bearer of the Sword", as leader and founder of AHAJ. ASG's main thrust was to establish an Islamic state in the southern Philippines following the end of MNLF secessionist movement.¹²⁶

In the pursuit establishing an independent Islamic theocratic state of Mindanao, ASG defined its ideological and operational agenda as intimately tied to an integrated effort aimed at asserting the global dominance of Islam through armed struggle.¹²⁷ The ASG is the smallest and most radical of the Islamic separatist groups in the southern Philippine and has raided resorts, taken tourists hostage, captured Christian villages, engages in bombings, assassinations, and extortion to promote an independent Islamic state in western Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, areas in the southern

¹²³ Zachary Abuza, "Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror," (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2003), 99.

¹²⁴ Filler, "The Abu Sayyaf Group: A Growing Menace to Civil Society," 131.

¹²⁵ "Field Handout: Doctrinal Extract for the Abu Sayyaf (ASG)," Philippine Marine Corps, 21 January 2002, 9-11.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Peter Chalk, "Al Qaeda and Its Links to Terrorist Groups in Asia," in *The New Terrorism: Anatomy, Trends and Counter Strategies*, eds. Andrew Tan and Kumar Rama Krishna (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2002), 113.

Philippines heavily populated by Muslims.¹²⁸ However, the ASG operates more like criminals than terrorists and are usually satisfied by collecting ransom.¹²⁹

Although ASG espoused Islamic extremism and called for jihad, the ASG lost their religious foundation with the death of their founder in 1998 during a clash with Philippine military and police forces. After Janjalani's death, the ASG instead turned more to criminal activities, such as kidnapping for ransom. Reportedly, his younger brother, Khadafi Janjalani, became the nominal leader of the group, which includes several factions. However, analysts maintain that ASG is returning to their religion basis with the help and influence of JI and the MILF.¹³⁰ The ASG kidnapped three American citizens in May 2001, and one was beheaded in June. In the spring of 2004, new evidence surfaced that Abu Sayyaf is active in Manila, as well. In April 2004, police officials reportedly determined that the February 2004 ferry bombing, in which over 100 people died, was the work of the ASG and the Rajah Sulaiman Movement, a group of idealistic Filipino Muslim converts from the Manila area.¹³¹ Douglas Lovelace, Director of the US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, maintains that "though the ASG is usually preceded with the words the 'al Qaeda-linked,' there was little tangible evidence of such a link from the mid-1990s to 2002. From its founding in 1991 through Ramzi Yousef's Bojinka Plot in 1995, the links were clear and convincing."¹³²

There are two major groups within the ASG that operates in Sulu and Basilan.¹³³ The Sulu based ASG is composed of several armed groups that has no formal organization and considered drastically beyond the fundamentalist attitude of the ASG. The Basilan based ASG, unlike their counterpart in Sulu, is organized into one

¹²⁸ Joshua Kurlantzick, "Fear Moves East: Terror Targets the Pacific Rim," *The Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2001), 22, available from <http://www.twq.com/winter01/kurlantzick.pdf>, accessed on 5 November 2005.

¹²⁹ Doug Bandow, "Our War against Bandits," *Cato Institute*, 18 January 2002, available from <http://www.cato.org/cgi-bin/scripts/printtech.cgi/current/terrorism/pubs/bandow-020118.html>, accessed on 10 November 2005.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ James Hookway, "A Dangerous New Alliance," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 167, Issue 18 (6 May 2004), 12, available from Pro Quest Database, accessed on 27 October 2005.

¹³² Foreword by Douglas Lovelace, Director of Strategic Studies Institute, in Zachary Abuza, "Balik-Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf," *Strategic Studies Institute*, US Army War College, September 2005, available from <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB625.pdf>, accessed on 28 October 2005.

¹³³ "Field Handout: Doctrinal Extract for the Abu Sayyaf (ASG)," 13-14.

main group led by Janjalani and Abu Sabaya.¹³⁴The ASG is organized into three basic groups within the whole organization. This grouping is utilized and during movement, combat, and occupation of temporary or permanent bases. These groupings are; Forward Security Element (FS), the Main Body (MB), and the Rear Security Element (RS). Figure 2 is an illustration of ASG combat elements.

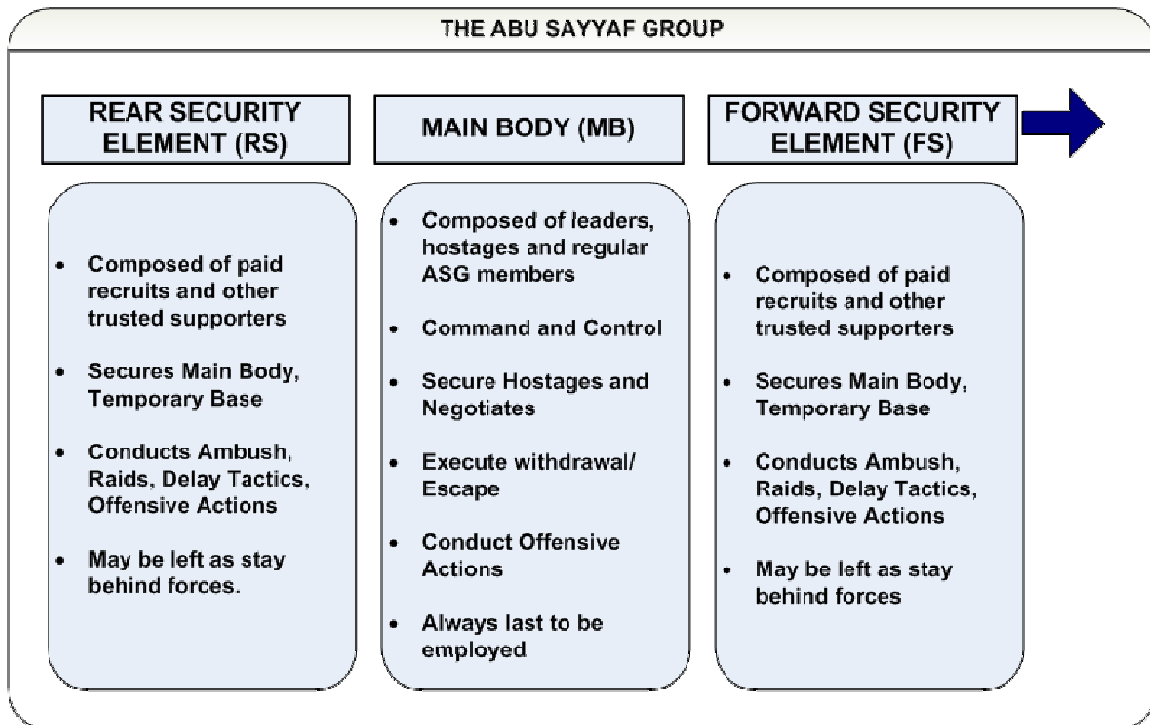


Figure 2. ASG Combat Elements¹³⁵

The ASG has transformed and ceased to further the ideological bases of their armed struggle. The consequence of this transformation will prove to be threatening in the current dimension of security concerns in southern Philippines. The ASG is an example of the transformation of local separatist movements in the southern Philippines where ideologues transformed in “commercial insurgents” because of the misunderstanding of ideology in behalf of pure profit and banditry. The Abu Sayyaf is changing its tactics and renewing its links with other extremists group, as Al Qaeda has increasingly sought to expand its key basing and staging region at Southeast Asia. Al

¹³⁴ Abu Sabaya was killed by Philippine Navy Special Operations Forces (NSWU-6) off the coast of Sibuco Town in Zamboanga Del Norte on 21 June 2002. The successful maritime interdiction operation was assisted by US Navy SEAL Team during the conduct of Balikatan 02-1.

¹³⁵ “Field Handout: Doctrinal Extract for the Abu Sayyaf (ASG),” 14.

Qaeda's complicated linkages with groups such as Abu Sayyaf, Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and the region-wide Jemaah Islamiyah has emerged as a challenge to Philippine-American cooperation on the war on terror.

D. GOALS AND PROCEEDINGS

The goal of the Balikatan exercise series is to improve Philippine and US interoperability against external aggression. However, the end of the Cold War and the new emerging threat of transnational terrorism call for revitalized security cooperation between the two countries. In this respect, Balikatan 02-1 was somewhat different from previous military training exercises. In the past, military exercises were geared towards improving the tactics, coordination and maneuvers against a hypothetical threat from a common external enemy. Balikatan 02-1 is aimed at a threat within the country, a small bandit group in Basilan, which is a target of the US war on terrorism. During Balikatan 02-1, participants were brought into the midst of an actual battlefield; the exercise lasted for about six months instead of the usual four week duration of previous exercises. Balikatan 02-1 had four specific objectives:¹³⁶

- 1) To improve the interoperability of Philippine and US forces against terrorism
- 2) To enhance the combat capability of the AFP Southern Command (AFP SOUTHCOM) and the infantry battalions based in Mindanao
- 3) To ensure quality in intelligence processing
- 4) To upgrade Philippine-US capability to wage effective civil, military, and psychological operations.

The United States and the Philippines agreed on a framework that US military forces would have no combat role, with their role is limited to the conduct of training and support operations to Philippine forces. Balikatan 02-1 represented a special counterterrorism-focused exercise on Basilan that involved 1,000 US forces in Mindanao. Training was also carried out in Luzon for two light infantry reaction companies, four light infantry battalions and helicopters for night operations. Current programs further enhance Philippine military counterterrorist capabilities through a five year program that started in 2002 that includes the terrorist interdiction program, a security assistance program and the transfer of excess military equipment and supplies under the Mutual

¹³⁶ Del Rosario, "A Progress Report on the Philippines: The Balikatan Exercises, the Abu Sayyaf, and Al-Qaeda," 1.

Logistics and Supplies Agreement (MLSA).¹³⁷ Balikatan 02-1 was conceptualized when President Arroyo met US President George W. Bush at a summit meeting in Washington D.C in November 2001. President Bush expressed his appreciation for the Philippines' support on the war against terrorism and offered direct US military assistance for the rebel-suppression campaign.¹³⁸ President Arroyo declined the offer of troops and instead requested new equipment and training for the AFP to enhance its capability in neutralizing the ASG.¹³⁹ The two state leaders approved an integrated plan providing for a robust training package for the AFP, delivery of equipment needed to increase the Philippine military's mobility, and creation of a new bilateral defense consultative mechanism.¹⁴⁰ On January 16, 2002, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced the deployment of approximately 600 US troops to the southern Philippines to act as military advisers to the AFP SOUTHCOM and provide training to improve intelligence capabilities, operations in urban environments, medical training, casualty evacuation, and other related activities. The Rules of Engagement (ROE) were that US personnel would not engage in combat but retained the right of self defense.¹⁴¹

The US military contingent deployed in Mindanao was designated as Joint Task Force 510 (JTF 510), headed by General Donald Wurster USAF, Commander of the US Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC). JTF 510 used a counterinsurgency model designed to sever the people's support to terrorists, strengthen appropriate government and military response to terrorism, and enhance the legitimacy of the government in relation to the people. JTF 510 applied a program of "building legitimacy" which included activities such as provision of potable water, medical care and facilities, confidence-in-government measures, all-weather roads, and maritime port and re-supply

¹³⁷ David Garcia, "US Security Policy and Counterterrorism in Southeast Asia," UNISCI Discussion Papers (May 2004), 7.

¹³⁸ Renato C. De Castro, "Revitalized US and Philippine Security Alliance: A Ghost from the Cold War or An Alliance for the 21st Century," *Asian Survey*, 2003.

¹³⁹ Anonymous, "Aiding the Philippines," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 164, Issue 48 (6 December 2001), 8, available from Pro Quest Database, accessed on 23 October 2005.

¹⁴⁰ "Joint Statement between the US and the Philippines," The White House Website (November 2001), available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011120-13.html>, accessed on 23 October 2005.

¹⁴¹ "Balikatan 02-1 Terms of Reference," US Pacific Command Website, available from <http://www.pacom.mil/imagery/archive/0202photos/termsreference.doc>, accessed on 23 October 2005.

areas.¹⁴² Additionally, it performed a number of tasks designed to enhance AFP response capabilities such as operations-intelligence fusion, task group training, unit training, professionalization of the non-commissioned officers, air mobility, maritime exclusion, staff integration, consistent rules of engagement (ROE) interpretations, and mission-focused psychological (PSYOP) and civil-military operations (CMO).¹⁴³

Balikatan 02-1 was conducted in three phases. Phase 1 was the preparation phase. A series of planning conferences and exploratory talks was held to determine priority areas of concern to the two forces. Phase 2 was the training and field exercise phase covering about a 4-month period. Phase 3 is the redeployment phase wherein participating US and Philippine personnel were returned to their respective units. During the six months of this operation, JTF 510 encountered a number of challenges and gained valuable benefits from lessons learned. The JTF had to scramble to get on top of public affairs issues and operations, and to deal usefully with the Philippine media. Humanitarian assistance required new and innovative approaches. Also, JTF 510 had to accustom itself to working together with non-government organizations.¹⁴⁴

For the whole duration of the exercise, the number of US military personnel deployed between January 2002 and July 31, 2002 was nearly 1,200, including 150 Special Operations Forces. The exercise also included the deployment of over 300 troops (primarily Navy engineers) to carry out civic action projects such as road-building on Basilan. The Balikatan exercise reportedly resulted in a significant diminishing of Abu Sayyaf strength on Basilan. Abu Sayyaf had a peak strength of 1,270 active members in year 2000 and by the end of Balikatan 02-1 in 2002, they were reduced to 460 active

¹⁴² James R. Corcoran, "Key Challenges to the War on Terrorism," in 2003 Pacific Symposium *Toward a Durable Regional Security Strategy*, 25-27 March 2003, available from http://www2.hawaii.edu/~corcoran/NDU_2003_PACIFIC_SYMPOSIUM2.htm, accessed on 27 October 2005.

¹⁴³ Christopher A. Parrinello, "Enduring Freedom," *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin*, Military Module (April-June 2002), 43.

¹⁴⁴ Corcoran, "Key Challenges to the War on Terrorism," 2.

members.¹⁴⁵ AFP operations improved as a result of US assistance in intelligence gathering, the provision of modern equipment, and aid in operations planning.¹⁴⁶

During the exercise, US troops performed limited roles such as providing intelligence support to the AFP SOUTHCOM and conducting special patrol and night operation training with AFP units. In effect, the US performed a purely supporting role, while the AFP retained the primary role of combating the ASG. US SOF personnel were also assigned to accompany AFP units in Basilan and although they were armed, they were bound by the ROE specifying that they fire their weapons only in self-defense. The objective of this arrangement was to allow US military advisers to observe and assess the performance of their Filipino counterparts.

E. THE OUTCOME

Militarily, Balikatan 02-1 was a mixed success. It was marked by an unsuccessful rescue effort that resulted in the deaths of the two hostages and the wounding of another. American missionary Martin Burnham was killed and his wife Gracia hospitalized after the rescue attempt by the Philippine military. Philippine nurse Ediborah Yap died during the rescue effort.¹⁴⁷ The exercise also failed to eliminate the ASG.

Nevertheless, the exercise was successful in capturing and killing of some of its key leaders. The most notable was the killing of Abu Sabaya in June 2002 by elements of the Naval Special Warfare Group of the Philippine Navy at the coast of Sibuco Town in Zamboanga Del Norte.¹⁴⁸ Abu Sabaya, whose real name is Aldam Tilao, was a prominent spokesman for the ASG. He was well known to Philippine radio stations, which he would call with threats of terror attacks. He first burst into international headlines with the kidnapping of 21 foreigners on Sipadan Island, Malaysia. The hostages

¹⁴⁵ Carolina G. Hernandez, "Institutional Responses to Armed Conflict: The Armed Forces of the Philippines," Human Development Network Foundation, Inc. for the Philippine Human Development Report 2005, 26, available from http://www.hdn.org.ph/bgpapers2005/AFP_Assessment.pdf, accessed on 24 November 2005. 26.

¹⁴⁶ Briscoe, "Balikatan Exercises Spearheaded ARSOF Operations in the Philippines," 19.

¹⁴⁷ George J. Gilmore, "Rescue Attempt Bolsters US, Philippine Resolve Against Terrorists," US Department of Defense, American Forces Information Service, 7 June 2002, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2002/n06072002_200206074.html, accessed on 25 October 2005.

¹⁴⁸ C. S. Kuppaswamy, "Philippines: The US Campaign against the Abu Sayyaf," South Asia Analysis Group, 23 July 2002, available from <http://www.saag.org/papers5/paper498.html>, accessed on 24 October 2005.

were released after an enormous ransom, believed to have totaled \$20 million, was paid by Libyan leader Muamar Qaddafi. The ransom was later used by the ASG to recruit followers from among the impoverished Muslim communities in the southern Philippines and to buy arms and equipment to continue their terrorist activities.¹⁴⁹

Despite the failure to eliminate the ASG as a threat group, the joint military exercise had considerable success in upgrading the AFP tactical maneuver force's combat capability and AFP SOUTHCOM's Integrated Territorial Defense System.¹⁵⁰ This was evident when SOUTHCOM neutralized the ASG's freedom of movement and minimized the group's capability to conduct terrorist activities in Basilan. However, the ASG responded to the military's tactical advantage by transferring its operations to other parts of Mindanao.

The biggest gain of Balikatan 02-1 can be viewed more as political rather than military. Balikatan strengthened domestic political support for the Philippine-American alliance as complemented the Philippine government's program of social reform and poverty alleviation to the poorest part of Mindanao.¹⁵¹ The local populace appreciated the economic and humanitarian assistance that accompanied the joint military exercise. The exercise also boosted the local economy through American employment of local companies for services like laundry and food catering.¹⁵² From the US perspective, the war on terrorism was extended in the Philippines without involving US troops in actual combat, as their participation was limited to advisory and humanitarian missions. On the other hand, the Philippines benefited from the US economic and military assistance. Balikatan 02-1 can be considered an example of a successful counterterrorist training and assistance mission accomplished on a small scale that combined various instruments (political, informational, civil affairs, economic, medical, etc.) with the military instrument of power to carry out a counterterrorist campaign.

¹⁴⁹ Niksch, "Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-US Anti-Terrorism Cooperation," 5, 7.

¹⁵⁰ Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Revitalized Philippine – US Security Relations: A Ghost from the Cold War or an Alliance for the 21st Century," *Asian Survey*, November/December 2003, 982.

¹⁵¹ De Castro, "The Revitalized Philippine and Security Relations," 985.

¹⁵² Gilmore, "Rescue Attempt Bolsters US, Philippine Resolve against Terrorists."

Balikatan 02-1 officially ended in July 2002 and attempts were made to negotiate a second phase of US training support for the AFP. The negotiations have experienced difficulties in determining the rules of engagement.¹⁵³ The basic issue has been whether any aspects of the US role could be considered a combat role. The two sides initially announced that US training of AFP light reaction companies would take place in northern Luzon and again on Mindanao. The objective was to train 16 light infantry companies by the end of 2003 for use against both Muslim insurgents and the NPA.¹⁵⁴ In July 2002, the two governments decided that, except for aerial surveillance, US military personnel would not be involved in the stepped-up Philippine military campaign against the ASG on Jolo Island, south of Basilan, where ASG has concentrated strength.

F. CONCLUSION

Balikatan 02-1 has contributed to the professionalization of the AFP in a variety of ways. The enormous amount of security and military assistance the AFP received from the US enabled the Philippine military to upgrade a significant portion of its obsolete equipment. The AFP also received valuable training from Balikatan 02-1 that otherwise would not have been available, especially for AFP Southern Command. AFP Southern Command contains more than half of the 117,000-strong AFP and compared to other unified commands, AFP Southern Command is responsible for combating elements of the communist NPA, the MILF, and the ASG in many areas of the Mindanao region. It is only but proper that focus be given to AFP Southern Command for military training and assistance because of its significant responsibilities. Furthermore, Balikatan 02-1 enhanced the AFP's capability to conduct civic action and humanitarian projects that also enhanced civil-military relations in many impoverished areas. Collectively these benefits offer an enormous boost to the effectiveness of the Philippine military, along with the heightened public image of the AFP. Balikatan 02-1 also ensured quality intelligence processing that supported AFP's combat operations, the electronic intelligence (ELINT) provided by US unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and satellite imageries, and confirmed

¹⁵³ The announcement of the plan caused immediate controversy in the Philippines. Filipino politicians and media organs criticized the plan as violating the constitutional prohibition of foreign troops engaging in combat on Philippine soil. Filipino Muslim leaders warned of a Muslim backlash on Mindanao.

¹⁵⁴ Mark Manyin, Richard Cronin, and others, "Terrorism in Southeast Asia," CRS Report for Congress, 13 December 2002, 8-9, available from http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/crsdocuments/RL31672_12132002.pdf, accessed on 26 October 2005.

by the AFP's human intelligence (HUMINT), provided for more efficient and successful conduct of military operations, reducing possible collateral damages, including the life and property of non-combatants.

Examining the degree of transparency during the planning and execution of Balikatan 02-1, it can be concluded that it was surrounded by "secrecy and lack of transparency" that triggered the activist and the politicians in condemning the joint military training activities. According to Concepcion Asis, "it was only late January [2002] when the Department of National Defense released what was to be known as the Terms of Reference (TOR) covering the joint exercises." It was only when the Balikatan 02-1 Terms of Reference was released did the public get to know what Balikatan was all about.¹⁵⁵

One reason why there were doubts, apprehensions, and fear on the conduct of Balikatan 02-1 in Mindanao was due to the lack of involvement of various non-military stakeholders in the planning stage. Planning of Balikatan 02-1 was mostly confined to military planners from both sides, except for some time when the Visiting Forces Agreement Commission were invited to attend. During the six months of Balikatan 02-1, US and Philippine military forces encountered a number of challenges, particularly in dealing with the Philippine media, and had to scramble to get on top of public affairs issues. Likewise, humanitarian assistance and civic action projects required new and innovative approaches, as well as accustom its forces in working together with NGOs and other sectors of the civil society.¹⁵⁶ Managing development in areas of armed conflict demands innovative and altruistic solutions from the various stakeholders in Mindanao. A comprehensive planning and coordination of all who need to be involved (military, police, local government units, volunteer groups, private businesses, other national government agencies and civilian institutions) are required in order to have an effective response in providing solution to the roots and causes of the armed violence in Mindanao.

¹⁵⁵ Concepcion C. Asis, "The Philippine SOFA and the State of the Philippine-US Security Relations," *Gathering for Peace, Philippines*, 13 September 2002, available from <http://www.yonip.com/main/articles/VFA.html>, accessed on 07 November 2005.

¹⁵⁶ Corcoran, "Key Challenges to the War on Terrorism," 2.

In view of the effectiveness of the humanitarian and civic action projects, the people of Basilan benefited in many ways from the projects conducted jointly by Philippine and US troops. One objective of the exercise is to reduce poverty in Basilan, which is considered a spawning ground for terrorist recruitment. Basilan has the lowest per capita income, the highest incidence of poverty, the lowest literacy rate, and the highest mortality rate. The combined efforts in Basilan during Balikatan 02-1 resulted in the construction of four wells that provide clean water, and the rehabilitation of an airfield that can now accommodate small commercial airline and will definitely open the province to opportunities for commerce and business. Likewise, the repair of roads and wharfs will reduce the cost of doing business in Basilan, facilitating the movement of goods and services, providing greater access within the province and to the other parts of the region and more importantly, enticing the entrepreneurs who fled from the violence to return and help rebuild Basilan. By increasing access to markets, the new infrastructure also allows for the easier movement of products from the countryside to the cities.

The positive impact of these projects are undeniable, as even the harshest critics admitted that such infrastructure projects helped improve the livelihood of the people.¹⁵⁷ The infrastructure projects helped restore a “new sense of peace and security.” Since the exercise, many residents of remote barangays in Basilan feel safe and secure and have now started to rebuild their homes, churches, mosques, and schools. People in Basilan now go out of their homes after dark, which is a sign that they no longer fear being caught in the middle of a firefight between government troops and insurgents.¹⁵⁸

Examining the support given by the Philippine civil society, a national survey showed that the Filipino public was highly supportive of the US military presence wherein 90% of Filipinos who are aware of the joint military exercises in Mindanao, 73% are in favor of continuing the exercises, and 65% of Filipinos support the extension of Balikatan.¹⁵⁹ At the conclusion of Balikatan 02-1, there were clamors for the extension of

¹⁵⁷ Radics, “Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Balikatan Exercises in the Philippines and the US War against Terrorism,” 125.

¹⁵⁸ “US Military Presence in Mindanao,” News Summaries, Philippine Daily Inquirer, July 2002, available from <http://www.philsol.nl/news/02/USMinda06-jul02.htm>, accessed on 25 October 2005.

¹⁵⁹ “Ulat ng Bayan National Survey,” Pulse Asia, Inc., Second Quarter (July 2002), available from <http://pulseasia.newsmaker.ph/main.asp?mode=&page=article&articleID=310314351370§ion=39911303370>, accessed on 05 November 2005.

the joint military exercise. According to Pulse Asia Survey, “among geographical areas, support for Balikatan is highest in Mindanao, where the military exercise was held and where American dollars boosted the local economy. 81% of the people of Mindanao who are aware of Balikatan are in favor of its continuation. Respondents from urban Mindanao, in particular, give resounding support for Balikatan, 87% of them favor its continuation, while 9% are against it and 4% are undecided.¹⁶⁰

In general, Balikatan 02-1 can be considered a partial success. In spite of successes of Balikatan 02-1, it also failed to completely eliminate the ASG threat. Although the joint military exercise denied the ASG freedom of movement, the ASG was able to transfer its base of operations to other parts of the Mindanao region. Balikatan 02-1 created a sense of security in Basilan, but this success may be temporary if no cooperative follow-up is forthcoming from the Philippine government. The joint military effort of “clearing” Basilan from threats posed by ASG should be taken advantage of in order to accomplish the Philippine campaign of “clear,” “hold,” “consolidate,” and “develop.” If this campaign is not pursued, a possible resurgence of violence, not only from the ASG but also from other threat groups, may emerge again on the island of Basilan.

¹⁶⁰ Emmanuel San Andres, “65% of Filipinos Favor Balikatan Extension,” Today’s Features, 14 August 2002, available from http://www.cyberdyaryo.com/features/f2002_0814_07.htm, accessed on 07 November 2005.

IV. STABILIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OPERATIONS AND THE FUTURE BALIKATAN EXERCISES

A. INTRODUCTION

Secessionist movements and the communist insurgency in the southern Philippines have put the Philippine government in a dilemma for more than three decades and have had a serious impact on the viability of the Philippines as a nation. Allowing secession is not an option for the Philippine government. Its ultimate goal is to keep the national territory intact. To accomplish this, the government must defeat the armed challenge posed by the southern Philippines secessionist movements and the NPA. In addition to fighting insurgents on the battlefield, the Philippine government also involved itself in peace negotiations with the insurgent movements. In 1996, the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front reached a final peace agreement. The peace agreement addressed some of the MNLF grievances and has reduced recurring threats to the Moro way of life.¹⁶¹

However, three major threat groups still exist, and additional groups are emerging.¹⁶² Peace talks between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front, the political front of the Communist Party of the Philippines, stalled in 2004, when the NDF unilaterally postponed the talks.¹⁶³ On the one hand, peace negotiation with the MILF continues, with Malaysia acting as a third party facilitator. The US Institute of Peace also provides facilitation assistance to the peace process. On the other hand, Abu Sayyaf Group still engages in violent terrorist activities and develops ties with other terrorist organizations. According to Abuza, one of the major concerns for the Philippine government is “the degree to which the ASG members have recruited from

¹⁶¹ Jacques Bertrand, “Peace and Conflict in the Southern Philippines: Why the 1996 Peace Agreement is Fragile,” in *Pacific Affairs*, Spring 2000, Vol. 73, Issue 1, 44.

¹⁶² In addition to the NPA, MILF and the ASG, the Rajah Solaiman Movement, composed of radical Muslim converts, emerged in the late 1990s and was reported to be responsible for several bombings in Manila.

¹⁶³ “GRP-CPP/NPA/NDF Peace Process,” Global IDP Website (September 2005), available from <http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewCountries/A3D7949223DCC989C1256C6E0046A667>, accessed on 2 November 2005.

Balik-Islam Organizations.” These groups, composed of Christian converts to Islam, have given the ASG a reach into regions beyond the Muslim dominated areas of Mindanao.¹⁶⁴

Since the beginning of the Muslim and communist armed insurgencies in the 1970s, the Philippine government has employed various approaches to end the armed conflicts in the country. The most recent is the “clear, hold, consolidate and develop” strategy. The military and the police focus on the “clear” and “hold” stages, while other government line agencies support them during these initial stages and then take the lead role in the “consolidate” and “develop” stages.¹⁶⁵ However, the campaign plan against the insurgency has not succeeded because the civilian agencies tasked to support the AFP in the last two stages (consolidation and development) have not been effective. Likewise, in many far-flung areas in the Philippines, local government officials and other civilian agencies are not always available, leaving it to the Philippine military to consolidate and develop these areas of conflict. From the AFP point of view, this is not a proper task for the military, and it is a task for which they are not trained.¹⁶⁶

This chapter introduces the concepts of stabilization and reconstruction operations that might be adopted by the Philippine government to build sustainable peace in the southern Philippines. As discussed in Chapter 3, Balikatan 02-1 illustrates how Philippine-American security cooperation can help promote sustainable peace in Mindanao. Incorporating the concepts of stabilization and reconstruction operations in future Balikatan exercises could enhance AFP’s capability. Likewise, stabilization and reconstruction operations can supplement the Philippines’ National Internal Security Plan in winning the war (and therefore winning the peace) in Mindanao.

B. “CLEAR, HOLD, CONSOLIDATE, AND DEVELOP” STRATEGY

The Philippine government utilizes the “strategy of holistic approach” with security, political, and socio-cultural-economic components to address the various armed

¹⁶⁴ Zachary Abuza, “Balik-Islam: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf,” Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, (September 2005), 35, available from <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB625.pdf>, accessed on 29 October 2005.

¹⁶⁵ Government of the Republic of the Philippines, “National Internal Security Plan,” 26 November 2001.

¹⁶⁶ Hernandez, “Institutional Responses to Armed Conflict: The Armed Forces of the Philippines,” 3-5.

conflicts or insurgencies.¹⁶⁷ The security component, consisting of the AFP and the Philippine National Police (PNP), deters or directly addresses violent conflicts, while the political component seeks the full cooperation of local government units and civil society in promoting good governance and local peace initiatives to create an environment and culture of peace in the community. The socio-cultural-economic component focuses on the ways and means to alleviate poverty and uplift the conditions of rural communities through the delivery of basic and social services.

There are four phases of the campaign. These are the clearing, holding, consolidating, and developing phases. The clearing phase involves the elimination of the enemy political infrastructure in the affected barangays and the destruction of the main enemy forces. This is the primary responsibility of Philippine security forces, spearheaded by the AFP. The holding phase consists of the reestablishment of government control and authority in the recovered areas. This is primarily the responsibility of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), supported by Department of Justice (DOJ) and the AFP. The consolidation phase overlaps with the holding phase. During this period, government control and authority is strengthened. Counter-organizations are further expanded in this phase, such as the people's organizations or cooperatives for various community-based components. The final phase is the developmental phase, when the people's organizations and cooperatives act as conduits for the government's antipoverty program by serving as nuclei for rural economic development. The entry of involved agencies requires coordination to achieve cooperative action. The overlap provides the opportunity to develop social capital and interoperability among the various agencies of both government and nongovernmental organizations.¹⁶⁸

Following is an illustration defining the roles and synchronizing the efforts in each of the stages:

¹⁶⁷ Alfredo L. Filler, "Abu Sayyaf: A Growing Menace to Civil Society," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 14, No. 4. Frank Cass Publications, London, 2004.

¹⁶⁸ "National Internal Security Plan," 39.

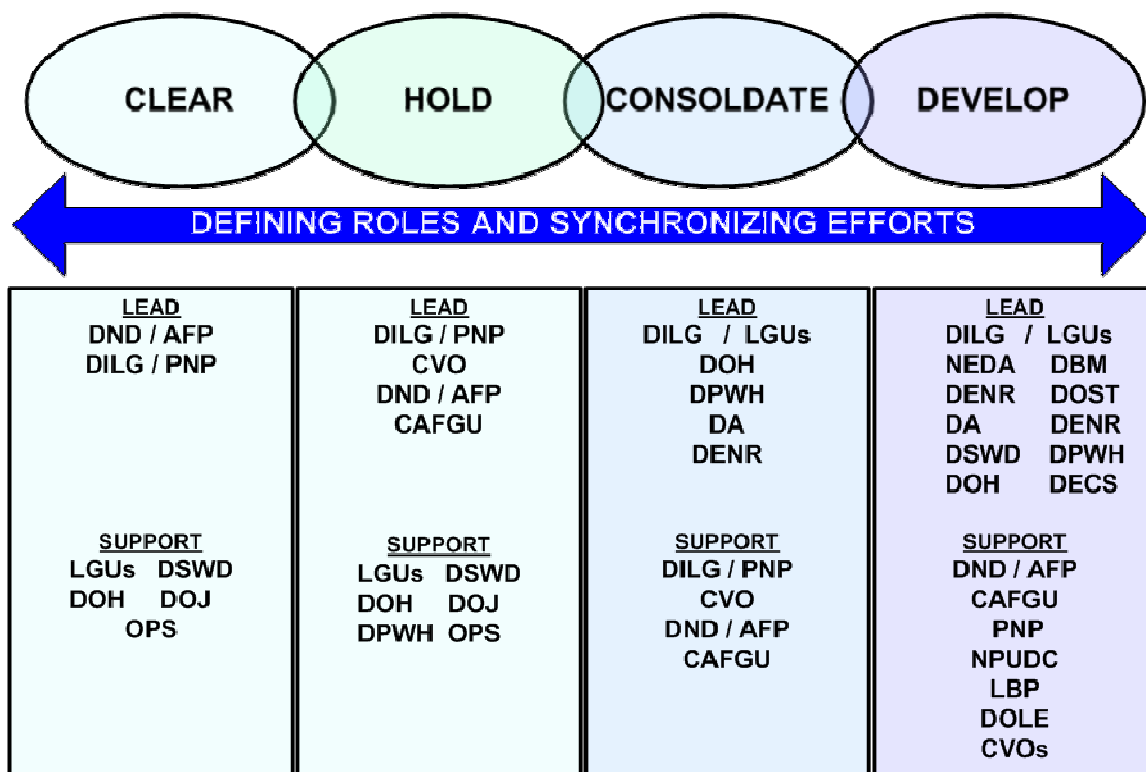


Figure 3. Defining Roles and Synchronizing Efforts of Line Agencies¹⁶⁹

C. STABILIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OPERATIONS

Securing the peace in the aftermath of a conflict is one of the major goals of military operations. The military's role in warfighting is unquestioned; however, its responsibilities in post-conflict environments are poorly understood. Similar to the Philippines' experience in fighting insurgencies, the US military was employed to support rapid social change during the occupation of Germany and Japan after World War II, and to preserve the status quo during the Cold War.¹⁷⁰ Traditional military operations have been characterized by planning for combat and a long buildup of forces, only after which would an offensive operation be launched. Armed conflicts typically last for long periods and end with negotiations for surrender or an armistice. When conflicts have relatively long durations, there is time to plan for stabilization and reconstruction

¹⁶⁹ "National Internal Security Plan," 39.

¹⁷⁰ Binnendijk and Johnson, *Transforming For Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations*, 3-5.

operations as the conflict winds down.¹⁷¹ Figure 4 illustrates the historical pattern of combat and stabilization and reconstruction missions.

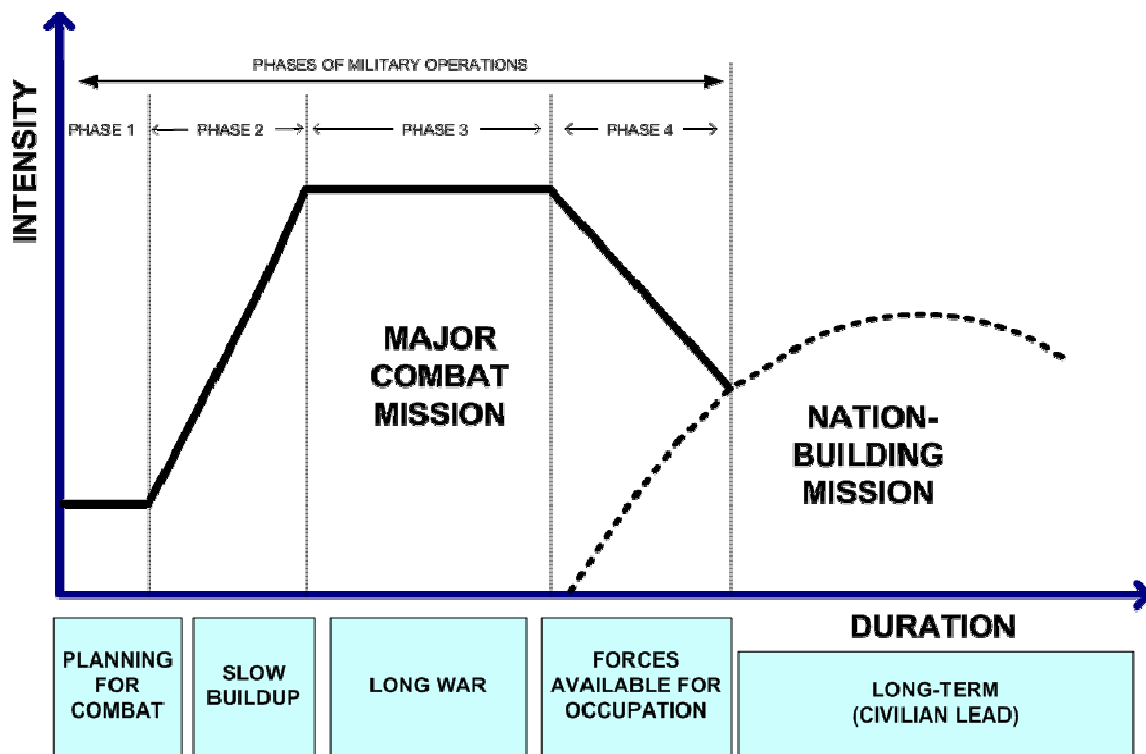


Figure 4. Historical Pattern of Combat and Nation-Building Missions¹⁷²

Adopting the above model in the context of the Philippine campaign against insurgency and separatism, the time spent planning the operations and deploying forces was compressed. With no plans for post-conflict operations, and without adequate capabilities to perform reconstruction promptly, there was a gap in addressing the roots and causes of the conflicts. Furthermore, planning and execution of AFP operations seldom involves other government agencies and civilian organizations. Figure 5 illustrates the gap in the aftermath of Philippine counterinsurgency campaigns that can be supplemented by stabilization and reconstruction operations.

¹⁷¹ Binnendijk and Johnson, *Transforming for Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations*, xiv.

¹⁷² Ibid.

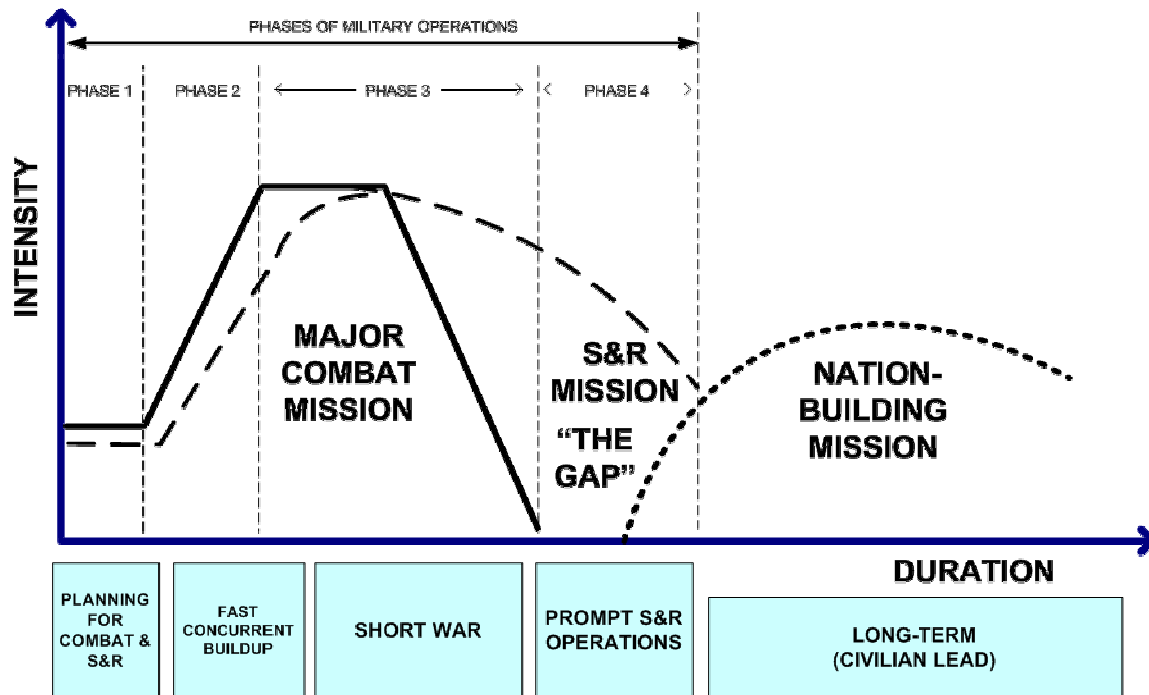


Figure 5. Developing AFP's S&R Capability: Bridge to Nation-Building¹⁷³

Stabilization and reconstruction missions (Phase 4) will address the gap between the end of major combat operations and the beginning of the nation-building. Planning for S&R missions should be concurrent with the planning for major combat operations and begins after the defeat of the enemy's military. When stability is established and reconstruction underway, the process of nation-building can proceed with the national and local government agencies taking the lead and supported by the military, NGOs and other private volunteer organizations.¹⁷⁴ Nation-building is a long-term process of promoting institutions which will provide for economic well-being and social equity of the people within the nation. Nation-building is often used simultaneously with democratization, political development, post-conflict reconstruction, and peace-building; however, each concept is different but all are intertwined. In general, nation-building can be described as the greater integration of state and society where the democratic

¹⁷³ Adopted from *Transforming for Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations*, (Washington D.C., National Defense University, 2004).

¹⁷⁴ Binnendijk and Johnson, *Transforming for Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations*, xv.

participation of the people is emphasized, together with the building of the society, economy, and polity that will meet the basic needs of the people.¹⁷⁵

The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Association of the United States Army jointly formulated a “four-pillared” approach to post-conflict reconstruction. These are meant to stabilize a state through the improvement of four vital areas: security, social and economic well-being, governance and participation, and justice and reconciliation.¹⁷⁶ Below is a description of the post-conflict reconstruction pillars as described by Robert Orr.¹⁷⁷

1. The security pillar addresses all aspects of public safety, particularly the establishment of a safe and secure environment, as well as the development of legitimate and stable security institutions.
2. The social and economic well-being pillar addresses the fundamental social and economic needs of the population, particularly the provision of emergency relief, restoration of basic services, laying the foundation for a viable economy, and initiation of a sustainable development program.
3. The governance and participation pillar addresses the need for legitimate, effective political and administrative institutions and participatory processes. Governance involves the setting of rules and procedures for political decision-making and administration to deliver public services in an efficient and transparent manner. Participation encompasses the process of ensuring active participation of the local populace in the formulation of government policies through advocacy groups, civic associations, and the media to help ensure the generation and exchange of ideas.
4. The justice and reconciliation pillar addresses the need for an impartial and accountable legal system and for ways to deal with past abuses, particularly the creation of effective law enforcement, an open judicial system, fair laws, humane corrections systems, and mechanisms for resolving grievances arising from the conflict.

The four pillars of post-conflict reconstruction are inextricably linked and a positive outcome in each area depends on successful integration and interaction across them. However, among the four pillars, security is considered the precondition for

¹⁷⁵ Carolyn Stephenson, “Nation Building,” Knowledge Base Essay, Beyond Intractability Website, available from http://www.beyondintractability.org/m/nation_building.jsp, accessed on 18 November 2005.

¹⁷⁶ Robert C. Orr, ed., *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2004), 305-327.

¹⁷⁷ Robert C. Orr, “The United States as Nation Builder,” in *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2004), 11.

fulfilling the other three pillars of post-conflict reconstruction.¹⁷⁸ A secure environment must be created after the cessation of hostilities in order to facilitate the operations of other assisting organizations from various international and domestic organizations.¹⁷⁹ The adequate establishment of security also fosters an environment where the local populace can conduct their daily business free from violence. However, this can be quite difficult in post-conflict environments where armed groups have disintegrated and diffused back into society without the skills to earn a living as civilians.¹⁸⁰ Thus, the effective disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of armed factions back into society's mainstream is important.

After achieving a secure environment, the improvement of social and economic well-being is also essential to post-conflict operations. In the aftermath of violent conflicts, often only "a small window of opportunity exists to restore economic hope and social well-being."¹⁸¹ Improvement of socioeconomic conditions, coupled with an improved security situation, reverses the myopic tendencies induced by the conflict; this further reduces the number of individuals likely to seek employment from insurgent groups.¹⁸² The focus in the short term must be on restoring basic human services, and then shift to long-term socioeconomic development. Likewise, improved education opportunities must be made available to the affected populace to help reduce the risk of conflict and to provide long-term social, political, and religious tolerance. As Johanna Mendelson Forman maintains, "Restoring education immediately after the conflict sends a signal of hope to families whose lives have been turned upside down by the conflict."¹⁸³ Returning children to school also has an important deterrent power, and

¹⁷⁸ Scott Feil, "Laying the Foundation: Enhancing Security Capabilities," in *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2004), 40.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 41.

¹⁸⁰ Roy Licklider, "Obstacles to Peace Settlements," in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, eds. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 704.

¹⁸¹ Johanna Mendelson Forman, "Restoring Hope: Enhancing Social and Economic Well-Being," in *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, ed. Robert C. Orr (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2004), 73.

¹⁸² Feil, "Laying the Foundation: Enhancing Security Capabilities," 40.

¹⁸³ Forman, "Restoring Hope: Enhancing Social and Economic Well-Being," 83.

removing young men from the streets limits opportunities for recruitment into insurgent and terrorist groups. Furthermore, the immediate reopening of the schools provides employment for many individuals in a community.

According to Robert Orr, “good government requires an interactive two-way process between the government and the governed” and an essential component of good government is the ability to enable citizens to make their views heard and to act on those views.¹⁸⁴ In post-conflict situations, building the capacity for governance and participation involves a broad range of tasks such as dialogues that “can help forge agreement on how the political system should be structured, or who should have a say in helping to design it.”¹⁸⁵ Likewise, strengthening institutions that deliver goods and services to the population is another governance task and ensuring transparency in the accomplishment of this task is a major challenge, as “corruption can severely undermine all other efforts.”¹⁸⁶ Transparency in governmental processes, such as budget development, fiscal flows, and delivery of goods and services, is vital for reducing corruption and its harmful effects. By insuring the free flow of quality information, government accountability can be promoted.¹⁸⁷

Another crucial factor in rebuilding war-torn societies is upholding the rule of law. The establishment of the rule of law in post-conflict communities addresses past grievances, crimes, and atrocities and is vital for moving societies away from the clutches of the “conflict trap.”¹⁸⁸ As described by Paul Collier, the conflict trap is the increased likelihood of reverting to a state of war if the previous conflict was more recently ended. Collier argues that “a country that has survived for a decade or more after independence before it first falls into the trap has a risk of new war ten times higher just after that war is ended than before the war started. If the country succeeds in maintaining post-conflict

¹⁸⁴ Robert C. Orr, “Governing When Chaos Rules,” in *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, ed. Robert C. Orr (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2004), 59.

¹⁸⁵ Orr, “Governing When Chaos Rules,” 60.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁸⁸ Michèle Flournoy and Michael Pan, “Dealing with Demons: Enhancing Justice and Reconciliation,” in *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, ed. Robert C. Orr (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2004), 89.

peace for ten years or so, the risk is considerably reduced, but remains at a higher level than before the conflict.”¹⁸⁹ In order to prevent or reduce this possibility, emergency justice measures should be established in order to deal with the most urgent law and order issues. These emergency measures may involve the deployment of international police forces, international monitoring teams, or multinational peacekeeping forces to monitor and mentor indigenous police forces. Additionally, activities promoting a culture of justice and reconciliation should be transparent and accessible to the broad population in order to support public security.¹⁹⁰ According to Flournoy and Pan, reconciliation is a long-term process and a “failure to address justice and reconciliation needs on a priority basis is a recipe for failure in reconstruction operations.”¹⁹¹

In applying the four pillars of stabilization and reconstruction, the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Association of the United States Army jointly developed a task framework for post-conflict reconstruction. Recognizing that reconstruction occurs at various times during and after conflicts, the task framework encompasses vital activities between the cessation of hostilities and the return to normalization. Similar to the Philippines’ “clear, hold, consolidate and develop” strategy, the post-conflict reconstruction framework is structured in conceptual phases. The framework includes three phases: initial response, transformation, and fostering sustainability. Initial response is often described as the military intervention for basic security, stability, and emergency services, while transformation focuses on developing legitimate and sustainable local capacity. The transformation phase often focuses on restarting the economy, establishing mechanisms for governance and participation, and securing a foundation of justice and reconciliation. Fostering sustainability, the final phase, consolidates long-term recovery efforts to prevent conflict and the reemergence of violence.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Paul Collier, “Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy,” World Bank, June 25, 2000, 83, available from <http://www.worldbank.org/research/conflict/papers/civilconflict.pdf>, accessed on 4 November 2005.

¹⁹⁰ Flournoy and Pan, “Dealing With Demons: Enhancing Justice and Reconciliation,” 91.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 100-101.

¹⁹² “Post-Conflict Reconstruction Task Framework,” Association of the US Army and Center for International Strategic Studies, May 2002, available from <http://www.csis.org/images/stories/pcr/framework.pdf>, accessed on 5 November 2005.

The National Internal Security Plan of the Philippine government articulates a sound strategy in countering insurgencies but it lacks a comprehensive plan that will integrate all efforts and resources of the national and local government agencies and non-governmental organization in promoting peace and development in Mindanao and other conflict-stricken areas in the country. The post-conflict reconstruction task framework and its four pillars of security, governance and participation, social and economic well-being, and justice and reconciliation, can enhance Philippines' counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies by providing a range of tasks often encountered when rebuilding communities in the aftermath of violent conflicts. The task framework will assist various Philippine government and non-government agencies in planning and coordinating their peace-building efforts, as well as help them conceptualize, organize, and prioritize responses by laying out the options that will help identify shortfalls and gaps in reconstruction process and capabilities.¹⁹³ By adopting a similar post-conflict task framework, a comprehensive strategic and operational plan can be established that will lay out priorities and an appropriate division of labor among the many national and local actors involved in the peace efforts.

D. FUTURE BALIKATAN EXERCISES

Stabilization and reconstruction operation are a new concept for the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The best way to learn this concept is by incorporating it into future Balikatan exercises. Stabilization and reconstruction operations can supplement the "clear, hold, consolidate and develop" strategy employed by the AFP in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism campaigns. Balikatan 02-1 provided a good example of how the "clear, hold, consolidate and develop" strategy can be effective in combating terrorism and insurgencies while at the same time transforming war-torn societies into viable communities. Balikatan 02-1 seriously degraded Abu Sayyaf group's capabilities. From a peak of 1,000 fighters in the mid-1990s, it has dwindled to a few hundred members.¹⁹⁴ Likewise, the humanitarian and civic action programs of "Operation Gentle Wind," with the help and support of international organizations, NGOs, and private volunteer organizations, provided medical treatment, supplies and

¹⁹³ "Post-Conflict Reconstruction Task Framework," 2.

¹⁹⁴ Hernandez, "Institutional Responses to Armed Conflict: The Armed Forces of the Philippines," 26, 30.

materials to the populace of Basilan and Zamboanga. Civil engineering projects, like the construction of water wells, farm-to-market roads, bridges, airfield, and a wharf were also completed. These projects definitely opened the war-torn province of Basilan to new opportunities for commerce and business, as these projects facilitate the movement of goods and services and in the long run reduce the cost of doing business in Basilan. More importantly, the improved business climate will entice entrepreneurs who fled from the violence to return and help in reconstructing the province. According to Angel Rabasa, after achieving a secure environment in Basilan “there is now greater confidence in the government’s ability to protect the population.”¹⁹⁵

The successes of Balikatan 02-1 can be adopted in future RP-US joint military exercises. In order to achieve more sustainable security in Mindanao, the involvement of key stakeholders during planning and execution of future exercises must be emphasized. The involvement of other organizations, like the local NGOs and private organizations, can increase the legitimacy as well as the transparency of planned activities. A higher level of transparency can reduce doubts and uncertainties of the real intent behind the activities, thus eliciting more support from the Philippine public. In the beginning, the Philippine public was apprehensive about supporting Balikatan 02-1, because the exercise was mostly conceptualized and controlled from a higher echelon. With minimum participation from concerned organizations and private citizens of Mindanao, an impression of secrecy about the real intention of the exercise was created. Wider participation by other government agencies, NGOs, and private organizations in future Balikatan exercises provides a good opportunity to build social capital that will improve relationships among parties working for peace and development in Mindanao. Social capital builds trust and norms that “can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action.”¹⁹⁶

In future Balikatan exercises, military action is vital and necessary but it is clearly not sufficient to deter and resolve insurgency or terrorism. Insurgency and terrorism are multifaceted problems that must be solved by a package of policies and programs to

¹⁹⁵ Angel Rabasa, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia: Moderates, Radicals and Terrorists*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 54-55.

¹⁹⁶ Ronald S. Burt, *The Network Structure of Social Capital*, (Illinois: University of Chicago, May 2000), 3.

effectively and simultaneously address the economic, social, political, and military aspects of the situation. The participation of other key stakeholders is as important as the role of the military, and the involvement of these other stakeholders can open new doors in achieving peace in Mindanao.

The Philippine National Internal Security Plan stipulates the creation of an Area Coordination Center (ACC) at the provincial level. The standard system of integration includes the interface of local government units, national government agencies, police and military, NGOs, people's organizations, and other stakeholders. The ACC is envisioned as an entity to coordinate and integrate the efforts of various stakeholders, taking into consideration their respective statutory mandates. The ACC is linked through various communication means to the members and participating stakeholders. Likewise, it is linked to the Operation Center (OPCEN) of the Cabinet Oversight Committee on Internal Security (COC-IS), which reports to the President through COC-IS.¹⁹⁷ Figure 5 illustrates the ACC at the provincial level.

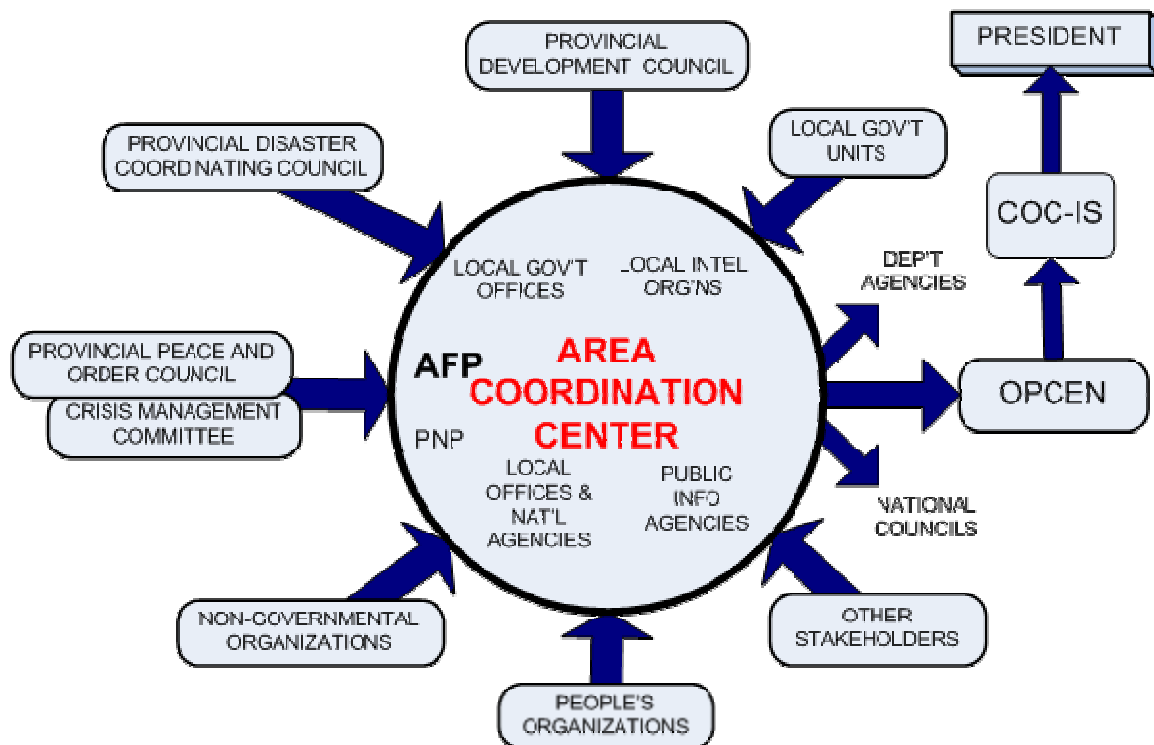


Figure 6. Area Coordination Center at the Provincial Level

¹⁹⁷ "National Internal Security Plan," 37.

The first ACC was established in Zamboanga City in Mindanao. It was used mostly to coordinate the police, military, and local government's anti-kidnapping efforts. The ACC was welcomed by the military. But the ACC acknowledges that its success depends on how it is run by local officials. Many are apprehensive that the ACC may duplicate the work of the peace and order councils led by local officials.¹⁹⁸ Reports indicate that some mayors and governors do not convene the peace and order councils, while others consider them to be “debating clubs.”¹⁹⁹ By involving the relevant stakeholders in joint planning and training, relevant stakeholders in Mindanao can effectively synchronize their efforts to achieve peace and development for the southern Philippines.

In previous Balikatan exercises, the focus was mainly on developing warfighting skills and capability. Training for post-conflict operations was limited to civil-military operations like humanitarian assistance and civic action projects. The majority of Balikatan exercises included three major events: Command Post Exercise/Staff Exercise (CPPX/STAFFEX), Individual and Unit Level Training (ULTEX), and Field Training Exercise (FTX). CPX/STAFFEX is the most common exercise used for training the battalion staff, subordinate, and supporting leaders to successfully plan, coordinate, synchronize, and exercise command and control (C2) over operations during mission execution. Balikatan CPX/STAFFEX included scenarios for the four phases of combat operations. Phase I covers preparation for combat, followed by initial operations in Phase II. Phase III is combat, and Phase IV is called post-combat operations. Phase IV is often described as post-conflict operations and usually begins soon after the advent of combat during Phase III, so the two overlap. Phase IV can also be described as “transition operations” because military forces try to transition the area of conflict back to peace and

¹⁹⁸ Peace and Order Councils were created to implement and execute national policies, plans and programs on peace and order; develop and implement a well-coordinated program of action; monitor and evaluate all governmental peace and order programs and projects in the locale; and conduct studies and researches to identify and address the problems on criminality, rebellion, insurgency and other forms of public disorder.

¹⁹⁹ Marites Dañguilan Vitug, “Civilianizing the War,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 15 April 2002, available from http://www.inq7.net/nwsbrk/2002/apr/15/nbk_2-1.htm, accessed on 8 November 2005.

civilian government control.²⁰⁰ However, Balikatan training activities have been more focused on Phase I to Phase III operations, too often ignoring Phase IV operations. As Conrad Crane argues, “military leaders and planners focused on winning wars, not on the peacekeeping or nation-building that came afterward.”²⁰¹ The military would usually rather not deal with nation-building, and prefer to quickly turn over this task to civilian government agencies and non-governmental organizations which are within their rightful sphere of responsibility and capabilities.

Examining the Philippines’ experience in fighting insurgencies shows that planning for post-conflict operations is often neglected and deemphasized. The AFP was effective in planning and conducting combat operations, but mostly failed in consolidating cleared territories because they generally lack plans and resources to consolidate these areas. During an interview with Satur Ocampo, a Philippine party list representative, said that in 1994, the AFP declared strategic victory over the insurgents but by 1998, a study came out evaluating the military counterinsurgency plan and it said that from 1994 to 1997 the insurgency was able to recover. The analysis was that while the military components of the counterinsurgency plan were implemented, the socio-economic components were not carried out wherein the people in the areas that were cleared did not gain anything. Thus, when the insurgents came back they were readily accepted. Ocampo further commented that the military component of the “clear, hold, consolidate, and develop” strategy was effective but the “develop” component was the part that did not happen.²⁰² While there may have been plans at the national level, and even within various agencies on Mindanao, none of these plans were transferred to the tactical level. As a result of inadequate planning for post-conflict environments, the AFP encountered much difficulty maintaining peace and security, thus allowing for the possible resurgence of violence.

²⁰⁰ Conrad C. Crane, “Phase IV Operations: Where Wars Are Really Won,” *Military Review*, May-June 2005, available from http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PBZ/is_3_85/ai_n14695885, accessed on 8 November 2005.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² The Armed Struggle and Agrarian Reform,” an exclusive interview with Satur Ocampo, available from http://www.inq7.net/exclusive/2001/sep/10/satur_10-4-1.htm, accessed on 24 November 2005.

E. CONCLUSION

In principle, the “clear, hold, consolidate and develop” strategy of the Philippines is on the right track to solve the root causes of armed conflicts in Mindanao. It outlines a plan for how the national government agencies can work together in the different regions of the country. However, in reality, lots of coordination and cooperation must be developed among these agencies in order to synchronize their efforts to provide solutions to the problems in conflict areas, especially in Mindanao.

The concept of stabilization and reconstruction operations can supplement Philippines’ National Internal Security Plan in operationalizing the “clear, hold, consolidate and develop” strategy. The post-conflict task framework is a good tool to help national government agencies work together toward a sustainable peace in Mindanao. It involves clearly identifying the different tasks that should be performed to foster a sustainable peace process. Likewise, involvement of Area Coordination Centers (ACC) in planning and executing future Balikatan exercises in Mindanao can develop social capital among the various stakeholders in Mindanao, which will facilitate peace and development projects that in turn can prevent and deter Mindanaons from joining terrorist and insurgent groups.

In conducting military training and exercises, it would be beneficial for the AFP to give due attention in the conduct of Phase IV operations. The Philippine military has been fighting insurgencies for the past three decades and has extensive experience in winning and losing wars, but has never developed its capabilities to win the peace in the aftermath of conflict.

V. CONCLUSION

For five centuries, the conflicts in Mindanao have persisted. The rise of transnational terrorism, combined with the continuing socio-economic and political deprivation of the Moros, may mean that the violence will continue unless the Philippine government undertakes a concerted effort to address the root causes of the insurgencies. Throughout the Philippine campaign against insurgencies and terrorism, the government approach relied predominantly on a military solution. The counterinsurgency approach in the “clear, hold, consolidate and develop” operational strategy specified by the National Internal Security Plan (NISP) outlines a coordinated and integrated effort to address the root cause of the insurgencies by the entire government machinery, with the support and participation of civil society. However, the lack of cohesion among the different Philippine government agencies and civil society in implementing the NISP impeded progress toward sustainable peace and development in the southern Philippines. Armed insurgent groups were defeated and the insurgents’ politico-military infrastructures were neutralized by the Philippine military, as lead government agency during the “clearing” phase. These accomplishments were mostly not preserved by civilian government agencies, which failed to reestablish government control and authority in cleared areas. Failures in “holding, consolidating, and developing” cleared territories may allow re-entry of or incursions by armed insurgent or terrorist groups, leading again to resurgence of armed violence. One major cause of this failure is the absence of a comprehensive operational plan that incorporates post-conflict operations (Phase IV) involving the Philippine military, other government agencies, civil society and other relevant stakeholders in Mindanao.

During the Philippine counterinsurgency campaign against the Huks in the 1950s, the Magsaysay government adopted a two-pronged military approach. The right-hand approach represented the armed response, while the left-hand represented socio-economic development, which was also the responsibility of soldiers. The left-hand approach included civic action projects that provided agricultural, medical, dental, and legal assistance to local communities where the insurgents operated. Roads, bridges, irrigation dams, schoolhouses and other physical infrastructure were also constructed. Part of the

left-hand approach was the awarding of lands in various parts of the country, particularly in Mindanao, to Huk insurgents who laid down their arms.²⁰³ The government strategy worked well in ending the Huk insurgency; however, land grants to former Huk insurgents in Mindanao heightened the Moros' grievances over land distribution. Land issues have been the most fundamental Moro concern and are considered an important factor fueling conflicts between Christian and Muslim settlers in Mindanao. Private property, as understood by Filipino Christians, did not exist in the minds of the Moros at that time. The Moros think of land primarily as belonging to a clan, while for the Christians, it was a matter of individual ownership.²⁰⁴ The Moro grievances became a "war of independence" during the 1970s, and the two-pronged counterinsurgency approach of armed response and socio-economic development became a pure "war of attrition." International intervention led to peace negotiations in 1976 that bore fruit when the Moro National Liberation Front signed a final peace agreement with the Philippine government in 1996. However, peace in Mindanao was temporary. Violence broke out again with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front continuing their struggle for independence. The Abu Sayyaf Group compounded the insurgency problem with its wanton use of violence and their reported involvement with Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah. Since the mid-1990s, Philippine intelligence organizations have been aware of possible international terrorist involvement, but the Philippine government saw the presence of Arab-looking foreigners as primarily related to the hostilities between government troops and Moro guerrillas in Mindanao.²⁰⁵ The September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States changed this perspective, bringing the international terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah into focus.

In support of the war on terrorism, the Philippines and the US governments decided to conduct Balikatan 02-1 in Mindanao. The US military provided military assistance, training and support operations to the AFP in combating terrorism, particularly against the Abu Sayyaf Group. However, the conduct of Balikatan 02-1 in

²⁰³ Hernandez, "Institutional Responses to Armed Conflict: The Armed Forces of the Philippines," 1.

²⁰⁴ Chester L. Hunt, "Moslem and Christian in the Philippines," *Pacific Affairs*, Volume 28, Issue, December 1955, 331-349, available from JSTOR Database, accessed on 12 November 2005.

²⁰⁵ William Wolters, "Muslim Rebel Movements in the Philippines: Recruitment for Al Qaeda terrorists?" *Focaal - European Journal of Anthropology* No. 40 (2002), 149.

Mindanao was challenged by Filipino nationalists, leftist militants and anti-US politicians as a violation of the Philippine constitution's prohibition of foreign military troops in combat operations on Philippine soil. The Philippine Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Balikatan 02-1 and specified that the Balikatan 02-1 Terms of Reference rightly fell within the context of the Visiting Forces Agreement.

Balikatan 02-1 successfully forced the ASG out of Basilan and this accomplishment facilitated humanitarian assistance and civic action projects proved beneficial to the people of Basilan. One objective of the exercise was to stop Basilan from becoming a spawning ground for terrorist recruitment by improving the socio-economic condition of the province. The construction and repair of farm-to-market roads and the rehabilitation of airfield and seaports provided greater access inside the province and facilitated the movement of goods and services, resulting in reduced costs of doing business in Basilan. Likewise, the infrastructure projects of Balikatan 02-1 helped restore a “new sense of peace and security” in the province so the populace felt secure enough to rebuild their lives under a rule of law. Balikatan 02-1 also contributed to the professionalization of the AFP. The US security and military assistance enhanced the warfighting as well as the civil-military operations capability of the AFP. The quality intelligence processing and improved operation-intelligence fusion achieved during the joint military exercise provided for more efficient conduct of military operations. However, in spite of these gains, Balikatan 02-1 failed to completely eliminate the ASG threat.

In view of the outcome of Balikatan 02-1, it is evident that military action is vital and necessary for combating insurgency and terrorism, but it is also apparent that military action is not sufficient to deter and resolve the root causes of insurgencies and terrorism. The participation of other government agencies, civil society, and other key stakeholders is as important as the military, and their involvement can open new doors to peace in Mindanao. National and local government agencies, NGOs and private volunteer organizations possess the knowledge and skill sets, if not the resources, to augment military capabilities in situations where AFP resources are already engaged. These situations include humanitarian and refugee assistance, establishment of political

institutions, and introduction of economic recovery initiatives like rebuilding basic services, including health and sanitation, transportation, and other human security infrastructures.

To coordinate government efforts to address the Philippines' perpetual insurgencies, the Philippine National Internal Security Plan mandated the creation of the Area Coordination Center at the sub-national and local government level. The ACC serves as an interface of national and local government agencies, the military and the police, NGOs and other stakeholders. Involvement of ACC members in planning, training, and execution of an overall counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operational plan can strengthen inter-agency coordination and cooperation in addressing the roots and causes of the insurgencies. The key to success in post-conflict settings is understanding that no military solution is possible without a political and economic solution, and that persistent conditions of insecurity prevent the accomplishment of an enduring positive, political and economic development.²⁰⁶

Like the US concept of stabilization and reconstruction operations, the Philippine strategy of “clear, hold, consolidate and develop” tasked the military to secure the peace in the aftermath of conflict. A secure environment must be created to facilitate the operations of other organizations in restoring basic human services and then long-term socio-economic development. However, Philippine counterinsurgency experience demonstrates that plans may seem simple on paper but turn out to be difficult to implement. One way to improve the capability to execute plans is through training. The Armed Forces of the Philippines and the US military have been conducting joint military training and exercises since Philippine independence in 1946. The Balikatan exercise series has been the largest military exercise since that time. This thesis argues that the Balikatan exercise series is an excellent platform to develop the AFP's stabilization and reconstruction operations capability with US military training assistance. Furthermore, the conduct of future Balikatan exercises in Mindanao would significantly benefit the AFP Southern Command, the people of Mindanao and the ongoing peace process.

²⁰⁶ Binnendijk and Johnson, *Transforming for Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations*, 17.

In addition to the involvement of non-military organizations during planning, training, conduct and assessment of the government's counterinsurgency and counterterrorism campaign, developing stabilization and reconstruction operations capability within the AFP can enhance the Philippine military's capacity to win the war and peace in Mindanao. As B.H. Liddell Hart suggests, "the object in war is to attain a better peace . . . If you concentrate exclusively in victory, with no thought of the after-effect . . . it is almost certain that the peace will be a bad one, containing the germs of another war."²⁰⁷

In conclusion, this study has shown that the Balikatan exercise series, in addition to its objective of improving combat readiness and interoperability between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the US military, can also be a significant peace-building tool for Mindanao. Since 1981, the exercise has focused on warfighting, failing to include plans and training for post-conflict operations in its exercise goals and objectives. Based on Philippine and US experience in conducting military operations, post-conflict operations are the most difficult to plan and execute, even under the best of circumstances. Military organizations concentrate on warfighting, and pay no attention to the challenges of dealing with the battlefield after the battle is over.²⁰⁸ Post-conflict operations should be an integral part of military planning. Key to immediate and long-term success during post-conflict operations is a sound initial plan with a clear vision of the end-state objectives, informed by situational understanding, and with provisions for adapting the plan to accommodate changing environmental conditions. The Armed Forces of the Philippines must learn the S&R operational concepts and practices relevant to post-conflict missions in order to meet challenges in post-conflict environments. AFP unit commanders, staff officers, and individual soldiers must learn how to plan, coordinate, and conduct S&R operations with their non-military counterparts. A unified effort between the military and non-military actors is essential to address the root causes of the Philippine insurgencies.

²⁰⁷ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (London: Farber and Farber, 1985), 353.

²⁰⁸ James Jay Carafano and Dana R. Dillon, "Winning the Peace: Principles for Post-Conflict Operations," The Heritage Foundation, 13 June 2005, 3-4, available from <http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/bg1859.cfm>, accessed on 12 November 2005.

The Balikatan joint military exercise is a good platform to learn stabilization and reconstruction operations. At the same time, conducting future Balikatan exercises with training activities focused on S&R operations in Mindanao will be beneficial not only to the AFP but also to the people of Mindanao. Like Balikatan 02-1 in Basilan, future Balikatan exercises can promote peace and development in other places in Mindanao. The humanitarian assistance and civic action projects associated with the exercise can provide numerous opportunities that will improve human security conditions in the region. Furthermore, Balikatan exercises can help build local capacity among the non-military actors in Mindanao. Non-military actors possess the knowledge and skill sets, if not resources, necessary to augment military capabilities in situations where AFP resources are not sufficient or already engaged in other security related concerns of a higher priority. These situations include humanitarian and refugee assistance, establishment of institutions, and the introduction of economic recovery initiatives that are important in rebuilding war-torn communities.

In order for future Balikatan exercises to successfully contribute in building sustainable peace in Mindanao, Area Coordination Centers at the provincial level must be involved during the planning and the conduct of future training exercises since they are usually knowledgeable about an area and its inhabitants. The ACC can help refine approaches that require military attention. Involvement of the ACC and other non-military organizations can help AFP commanders to think through the consequences of their actions and assist them to recognize minimal requirements to plan their rules of engagement during and after the conflict. One of the most difficult tasks during counterinsurgency campaigns is integrating the diverse military and civilian agencies operating in the post-conflict environment and without a shared strategic vision, various actors will adamantly adhere to their own views and orientations, unwilling to integrate their efforts with the efforts of others. Building the capacity of the Area Coordination Centers at the local government level can help improve interagency coordination that will facilitate the integration and synchronization of efforts among the stakeholders. A unity of effort is essential to the establishment of an integrated, interagency response in support of a coherent strategy for stabilization and reconstruction operations.

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